

What's Poppin'?

What's popped and what's flopped, in a theater near you.

CABIN FEVER

Sick of horror flicks where the acting is lacking and the gore is a bore? Then bow at the feet of debut director Eli Roth, who has co-written an instant cult classic filled with nauseating bloodbaths, tongue-in-cheek humor and colorful characters. I can't wait to see it again.

—Jim Radosta

COLD CREEK MANOR

City slickers Dennis Quaid and Sharon Stone buy a house in the sticks and face nasty opposition from local yokels in this sleek thriller from director Mike Figgis (*Leaving Las Vegas*). Sure, villain Stephen Dorff is a ham, but at least his lean shirtless scenes prove he's no pig.

—JR

DUPLEX

An unexpected queer twist (Harvey Fierstein's involved, but the twist is still unexpected) does little to aid this Danny DeVito-directed comedy about a couple (Ben Stiller and Drew Barrymore) purchasing a dream apartment and eliminating its feisty, rent-controlled centenarian tenant. All-around clumsy vapidity sabotages laughs that should've been had from the inter-generational warfare. There are still some giggles, but you could do better with *Simpsons* reruns or even DeVito's own *The War of the Roses*.

—Christopher McQuain

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Writer/director Sofia Coppola's sophomore effort stars Bill Murray as a down-on-his-luck actor shooting TV commercials in Japan and Scarlett Johansson as a recently wed, ennui-ridden young woman. Adrift against the backdrop of a sometimes very foreign culture, the pair strike up an intense, ambiguous friendship. Coppola has the visual artistry and emotional subtlety to make this feel like a less eccentric, more platonic *Harold and Maude*. It's a terrific film.

—CM

SCHOOL OF ROCK

Jack Black cements his status as a superstar in this edgy yet endearing comedy from director Richard Linklater (*Dazed and Confused*) and writer Mike White (*Chuck & Buck*) about a wannabe rocker who poses as a substitute at an uptight prep school to make some quick cash. He soon liberates the kids by helping them form



Belying the trailers, *School of Rock* is charming fun

dud, bottom of the bag

only if you're really hungry

good effort, pass the salt

mmmm, tasty!

get the big tub o' corn

a band, and they teach him a few life lessons as well.

—JR

SECONDHAND LIONS

Haley Joel Osment plays a bland, apparently hormone-free teen-ager left with his curmudgeonly uncles (the venerable but mostly wasted Robert Duvall and Michael Caine) by his frivolous mother (Kyra Sedgwick, in a much-too-broad Southern-gal performance that wouldn't have cut it on *Designing Women*). Charmless whimsy and folksy value lessons ensue. You know the kind of children's movie that's great because grown-ups can equally enjoy it? This is the other kind.

—CM

UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN

After Diane Lane's ravishing performance in *Unfaithful*, I was so hoping she had landed one of those cut-above romantic comedies. But not really. This tale of a woman whose lesbian friends give her their Italian tour tickets after divorce has left her battle-scarred begins really well with genuine emotion, earned laughs and gay-friendly subplots, but it becomes so bogged down in metaphor and moral it's ultimately suffocating.

—Lisa Bradshaw

UNDERWORLD

Stealing from *The Matrix* and *Blade*, this humorless flick imagines a city infested with vampires and hairless (!) werewolves who are at war, with a human (Scott Speedman) caught in the middle and Kate Beckinsale as a vampire huntress. The costuming—leather and rubber bondage—is the only thing to recommend. Devoid of charm or originality, and with a two-hour-plus running time, *Underworld* will make audiences feel like they're undead.

—Andy Mangels

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