



BIG FISH

Albert Finney shines in this otherwise dismal look at a man (Billy Crudup) about to become a father trying to solve the mystery of his own dying father's (Finney) tall tales. Too fantastical for its violence and too violent for its fantasy, *Big Fish* is yet another example of a Tim Burton directing job gone wild (see: *Sleepy Hollow* and *Planet of the Apes*).

—Lisa Bradshaw

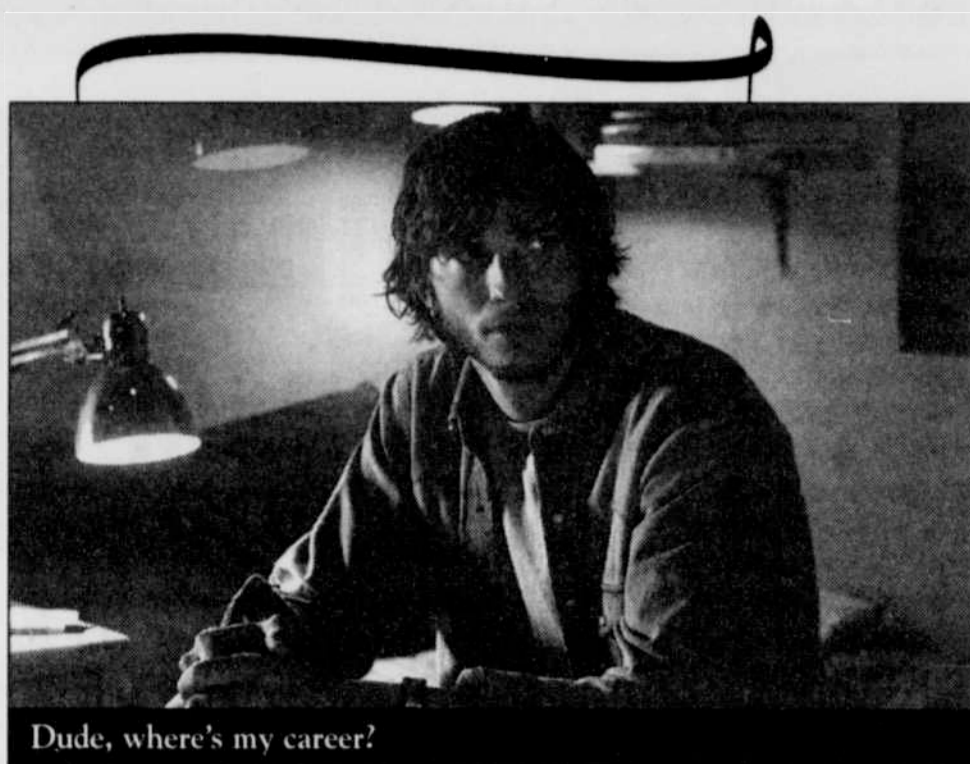
THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

A college student (Ashton Kutcher) exploring the blackouts he experienced as a kid discovers his ability to travel back in time to change his troubled past and that of his 1) crazy father, committed to a mental institution; 2) single, hard-working, young mom; 3) girlfriend terrorized by her drunken pedophile father; 4) brutally cruel girlfriend's brother; 5) childhood friend driven insane by acts of brutally cruel girlfriend's brother. Sound like too much? It is.

—LB

CALENDAR GIRLS

This winning little English film recounts the true story of a bunch of middle-aged villagers who decide to add a little spice to the annual fund-raising calendar of their women's organization—by posing nude. Helen Mirren leads a graceful cast of characters who really do become more and more attractive the



Dude, where's my career?

more confident they get. Sure, it's formulaic and a little cheesy—but in a good way.

—LB

HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG

An alcoholic divorcée (Jennifer Connelly) takes revenge on an Iranian immigrant (Ben Kingsley) whose family moves into her foreclosed house after she neglects to pay the bills. Although beautifully shot and well-acted, this tragedy left my eyes dry because the central figure draws little sympathy for her self-centered actions.

—Jim Radosta

MONSTER

Charlize Theron should win the Golden Globe for her lead role in this gritty true-life

story about queer serial killer Aileen Wuornos, a prostitute who murdered six men 13 years ago in Florida.

Writer/director Patty Jenkins manages to combine multiple social commentaries relatively free from judgment while eliciting superb performances from Theron, Bruce Dern as her only real friend and Christina Ricci as her partner—who alternately loves and uses her.

—LB

MYSTIC RIVER

Rereleased for Oscar fanfare, this murder mystery is more somber and intense than most. Director Clint Eastwood does well by the actors, including Tim Robbins, Kevin Bacon, Laurence Fishburne, Laura Linney and Marcia Gay Harden. (Sean Penn is a little too Method; his "thing" works better in *21 Grams*.) It's not quite the powerhouse many critics claim but still a fine example of solid, confident storytelling.

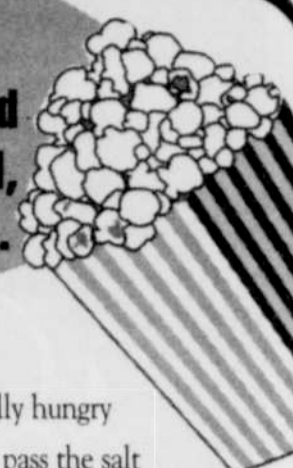
—Christopher McQuain

PIECES OF APRIL

Writer Peter Hedges (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape*) makes his directorial debut with this quirky dramedy about a black sheep (Katie

What's Poppin'?

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



- ☁ bottom of the bag
- ☁☁ only if you're really hungry
- ☁☁☁ good effort, pass the salt
- ☁☁☁☁ mmmm, tasty!
- ☁☁☁☁☁ get the big tub o' corn

Holmes) who reluctantly prepares Thanksgiving dinner for her dysfunctional family because Mom (Patricia Clarkson) is dying of cancer. The film has scattered moments of insight but never stays on track, and the ending is a major cop-out.

—JR

WIN A DATE WITH TAD HAMILTON!

I'm grading this youthful romantic comedy on a curve because, well, I'm a child of the '80s who appreciates any directors aspiring to be the next John Hughes. Robert Luketic (*Legally Blonde*) shows promise with a cute concept (small-town girl scores night out on the town with celebrity bad boy trying to clean up his act), a formulaic twist (best bud hides his crush on her) and memorable characters (horny friend, unhip dad, shallow agents).

—JR



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