

What's Poppin'?

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

A DIRTY SHAME

John Waters reclaims his king-of-crudity title with this zestfully tacky gross-out comedy. When a freak accident transforms a bored Baltimore housewife into a sex addict, the triggered chain of events culminates in a showdown between the city's prudes and its swingers, with almost any conceivable sexual deviation celebrated—in detail—along the way. The film is both raunchy and affectionate, gross and good-natured—in other words, a guaranteed good time.

—Christopher McQuain

FIRST DAUGHTER

Cutie pie Katie Holmes plays Samantha, a first-year college student who happens to be the president's daughter. Sam just wants to fit in, but her classmates treat her like a circus freak, and she gets entangled in a romance that the tabloids eat up like ice cream. The corny and witless opening scenes do not bode well for the movie. But *First Daughter* gets into an enjoyable, though predictable, groove once our prim heroine starts trashing it up at frat parties and sleazy bars.

—Stephen Blair

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

"The clouds" might be a better place to spend time than at this tired wartime romance. Director John Duigan pulls out all the tricks familiar to readers of Harlequin romances and polishes them quite nicely—the movie *looks* great—but underneath it's still just a contemporary version of a clichéd-drenched old-time Hollywood "women's picture." Charlize Theron is the poor little rich girl who glides through endless romances (including a hot lesbian affair with Penelope Cruz) in occupied Paris. Sad to say, the actors lack chemistry. They huff and puff but ultimately can't breathe life into this trite tale.

—Gary Morris



The Motorcycle Diaries is short on facts about Che Guevara

HERO

In ancient China, a mysterious assassin arrives at an emperor's palace. His intentions—to aid the ruler...or to destroy him?—are revealed through subjective,

dud, bottom of the bag

only if you're really hungry

good effort, pass the salt

mmmm, tasty!

get the big tub o' corn

Rashômon-like flashbacks. Director Yimou Zhang (*Raise the Red Lantern*), evidently an obsessive cinematic perfectionist, has made a film that approaches greatness. An inimitable vibrancy emanates from every luscious, colorful frame. *Hero* is a must-see.

—CM

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

Gael García Bernal (*Y Tu Mamá También*) plays the young Argentine Ernesto "Che" Guevara in a film that explores the ideological origins of the much-venerated revolutionary martyr. Director Walter Salles, working from autobiographies by Che and his close friend, Alberto Granado (played in the film by Rodrigo De la Serna), brings us the two friends' coming-of-age road trip through South America, where bourgeois young Ernesto first glimpses the People's struggle. Salles unequivocally romanticizes Che, leaving the film long on (admittedly quite lovely) atmosphere and short on facts, but it is supremely acted and, at the very least, an undeniably gorgeous and revealing travelogue of the continent to our south.

—CM

SHAUN OF THE DEAD

Why are British zombie movies so darn good? Shaun tries to keep his relationship together with his girlfriend, his slobby flatmate and his clueless mother, even as England dissolves around him into a land of walking undead. Sounds silly, but this movie is probably the funniest and most heartfelt of the year. See it before it becomes the cult classic it's destined to be.

—Andy Mangels

SKY CAPTAIN AND THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

It's 1939, and gutsy woman reporter Polly Perkins (Gwyneth Paltrow) and her sometime paramour, dashing fighter-plane pilot Sky Captain (Jude Law), must save the world from a mad scientist's apocalyptic scheme. *Sky Captain* has its moments—the romance is of the snappy, unsentimental, screwball-comedy variety, and first-time director Kerry Conran uses cutting-edge technology to create some memorably luscious visuals—but it finally succumbs to dull action-movie clichés.

—CM

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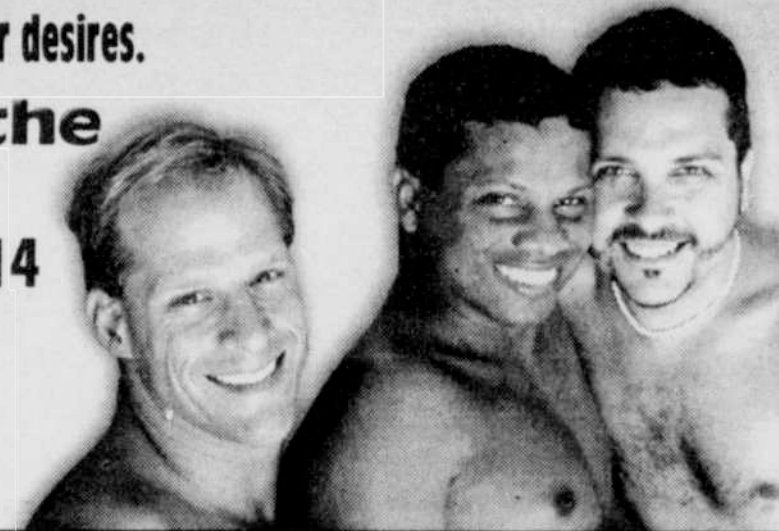
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