

REVIEWS

George A. Romero's Land of the Dead

Zombies are the hot monster in Hollywood right now, feeding into our fears of death and loss of individualism. George Romero is credited for making zombie movies great, and this time out he has a budget and a political agenda. But although it has good sets, strong photography and a few real actors, *Land of the Dead* is slow-going and dull, with only Dennis Hopper's antics to liven it up. You may feel your brain has been eaten after seeing it. **C-**

—Andy Mangels

artist (July), who pays her rent by transporting senior citizens in an "Elder Cab."

Meanwhile, the salesman's children and their friends explore life's byways and boundaries in that sweetly curious, recklessly uninhibited way that only children can. July's fearless, expert handling of the children—especially their irrepressible, nonchalantly shocking perceptions of "serious" grown-up matters like romance and sex—compensates for the film's sometimes compelling, sometimes cutesy actual grown-up romance.

It's sometimes too apparent that the storylines were probably conceived separately and

Heights

This ensemble drama follows several characters through one tumultuous day in New York City. A bitter stage legend (Glenn Close) flirts with a young actor (Jesse Bradford) to numb the pain of her open marriage. Her photographer daughter (Elizabeth Banks) is having second thoughts about her upcoming marriage to a sexually conflicted lawyer (James Marsden) who's being pursued by a journalist (John Light) inquiring about a famous artist from their past. An unexpected twist ties these overlapping stories together in an emotional climax. **B+**

—Jim Radostan



James Marsden and Elizabeth Banks take a bumpy ride to the altar in *Heights*.

then (not always seamlessly) conjoined, but the sum of its parts is far greater than the whole. Opens July 1 at Cinema 21. **B+**

—Christopher McQuain

Mysterious Skin

Writer/director Gregg Araki finally comes into his own as a major film artist in this small-town story of two troubled 18-year-old boys (Brady Corbet and Joseph Gordon-Levitt) on a search for their missing childhood. Now playing at Hollywood Theatre, *Mysterious Skin* does the unimaginable in cautiously visualizing the quiet nightmare of molestation. More a series of striking vignettes than a straight narrative, the film expertly weaves in and out of past and present and through these boys' attempts to come to grips with something beyond their control. **A**

—Gary Morris

War of the Worlds

Spectacular visual effects meet a spectacularly bad script in this update of H.G. Wells' 1898 sci-fi classic. In his biggest misfire since *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, director Steven Spielberg fulfills half of his job requirements by serving up breathtaking images of merciless lightning storms and sky-high tripods that instantly zap earthlings to death. But all the bells and whistles in the galaxy can't redeem the brain-dead story of an average Joe (Tom Cruise) who'll do anything to keep his kids from getting anally probed. You can't help but wonder what made Spielberg—the guy who put a smiley face on human-alien relations in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*—close his heart to creatures from other worlds. **C**

—Stephen Blair

Man with the Screaming Brain

I wanted so badly to like this film. Bruce Campbell is an Oregonian, a charmingly funny actor/writer and a good-looking daddy-type. So to see him write, direct and star in a film in which he plays a businessman who has a Russian taxi driver's brain half-implanted into him should have been a joy. Unfortunately, what could have been a sprightly segment of some *Twilight Zone*-ish anthology is instead drug out to an absurd length. Where are the movie-mocking *Mystery Science Theater 3000* robots when we need them? And can someone please feed blight-on-acting Ted Raimi to some zombies? Opens July 8 at Hollywood Theatre. **D**

—AM

Me and You and Everyone We Know

Former Portland-based video/performance artist (now Los Angeles-based indie filmmaker) Miranda July's debut feature—which she wrote, directed and stars in—is a bit of a mixed bag, but when it works, it offers a unique take on the fear and beauty underlying even the most mundane modern lives. A just-separated department store shoe salesman (John Hawkes) is romantically pursued by a struggling video/performance

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