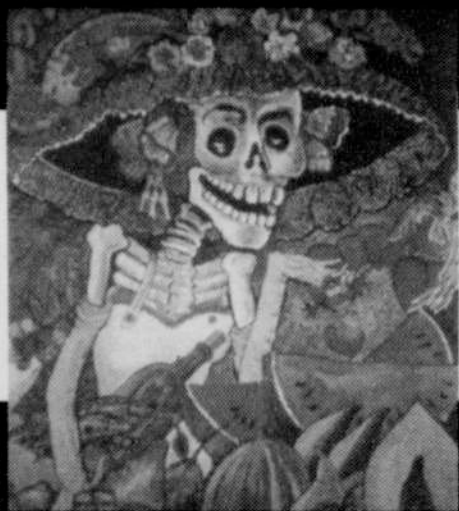


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film

Bee Season

How do you spell "tedium"? After seeing this mis-handled adaptation of Myla Goldberg's excellent novel, you'll fight the urge to say, "B-E-E S-E-A-S-O-N." The film, starring Richard Gere and Juliette Binoche, faithfully follows the book's plotline about an 11-year-old spelling wiz and her seemingly perfect but highly dysfunctional family. But co-directors Scott McGehee and David Siegel (who fared far better with *The Deep End*) get the tone all wrong. Goldberg's book is dark, but it has a comic edge. Here, the proceedings are humorless, and the wannabe weighty religious themes come across as mystical mumbo jumbo. **C**

—Stephen Blair

Derailed

This English-language debut film by Swedish director Mikael Håfström (*Evil*) is a sexy psychological thriller based on the novel by James Seigel. Lucinda (Jennifer Aniston, finally getting the chance to play the grown-up part) and Charles (Clive Owen) meet while commuting in Chicago and, even though they are both married, become quickly attracted to each other. They finally end up in a hotel room, but the liaison turns into a nightmare when gangster LaRoche (Vincent Cassel) shows up. While the film is sometimes violent, it definitely holds your attention with several unpredictable twists. **A**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

The Dying Gaul

Robert (Peter Sarsgaard) is a queer screenwriter who's penned 15 scripts with no luck. No. 16, with the not-exactly-commercial title of *The Dying Gaul*, finds a fan in producer Jeffrey (Campbell Scott), who offers Robert a million bucks for the rights. One catch, though. The script is apparently a dark love story featuring two gay men, which Jeffrey dismisses as box office poison, proposing instead to make it a *breeder comedy*. There's another catch: Jeffrey is hot for Robert, despite the latter being unhinged after the death of his lover from AIDS. Enter Mrs. Jeffrey, Elaine (Patricia Clarkson), a former screenwriter turned bored society wife who learns of hubby's gay affair when she—hold your hat—impersonates Robert's dead lover in a gay sex chat room. (Code name: ArchAngel!) Things get exponentially more unbelievable from there.

If the plot sounds contrived, it is—big time. Writer/director Craig Lucas based *The Dying Gaul* on

his play of the same name, and it has the stagy, schematic feel of a play throughout, with lots of overheated dialogue, curious coincidences and clueless characters who can't figure out what the audience sees—and they should have—from a mile away. And for a queer filmmaker whose other credits include *Longtime Companion*, Lucas serves up one of the most stereotyped faggots this side of *Will & Grace*. Sarsgaard inexplicably, and annoyingly, plays Robert as an ultrasensitive, eye-rolling queen right down to an unconvincing lisp and a fascination with flowers. Some viewers will cringe at the sex scene in which Sarsgaard, whose alluring nipples and fuzzy butt were seen to better advantage in *Kinsey*, wails and screeches and freaks out to operatic excess.

That said, the movie is surprisingly watchable, as we breathlessly await the next contrivance or cliché. The Hitchcockian cat-and-mouse game between Elaine and Robert in the queer chat room is engaging despite the quasi-supernatural trappings, kind of like an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. And while neither Sarsgaard's homo hero nor Scott's instant bisexual are particularly credible, Clarkson is intriguing at least for a while, before she apparently realized the limitations of the role. File this one under Guilty Pleasures. Opens Nov. 18 at Cinema 21. **C**

—Gary Morris

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

This first PG-13 installment of the series makes good on the revised rating—this film is *not* for small children, filled as it is with blood, violence, peril and squirm-inducing sexual and social tension. For those older than 12, though, *Goblet* is an alternately funny and tension-filled journey into a fantasy world populated with people we know and creatures we secretly fear. A must for fans and an eye-popping, entertaining ride for those who tag along. **A-**

—Jemiab Jefferson

Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang

As the saying goes, dying is easy and comedy is hard. Thankfully, the thoroughly enjoyable *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* delivers both with panache.

Robert Downey Jr. plays Harry Lockhart, a small-time burglar who stumbles into an audition and gets chosen to screen-test for a detective movie in Hollywood. At a party, he meets "Gay Perry" (Val Kilmer), the homo private eye who will be giving him detective lessons for his character. He also meets



From left, Campbell Scott, Patricia Clarkson and Peter Sarsgaard star in the contrived but watchable *The Dying Gaul*.