

film

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress

A great adaptation of the international best seller *Balzac*, this 2003 Golden Globe nominee tells the simple story of a classic boy-meets-girl scenario with a

surprising twist at the end. The film benefits greatly from the splendor of its setting and from its three lead players, not to mention the insight this story offers Westerners into the Chinese cultural revolution. The story movingly captures Maoism's attempts to imprison one's mind and heart (with the threat of the same for one's body), the shock of the sudden cultural shift for "bourgeois" Chinese and the delight that movies can offer a downtrodden spirit. Definitely worth catching for the visual scenery, and must-see viewing for those who appreciate quaint romances. Opens Dec. 2 at Hollywood Theatre. **A**

—Yvonne P. Behrens



The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo provides the fullest visual portrait to date of the bisexual artist and her tempestuous marriage to Diego Rivera.

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-**

—Jemiah Jefferson

Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang

Robert Downey Jr. plays 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 a homo private eye (Val Kilmer) who gives him detective lessons for his character. He also meets a wannabe actress (Michelle Monaghan) who has surprising ties to his past and a shared love for pulpy 1950s detective novels. Soon, the trio is plunged into a real murder mystery that threatens all of their lives. Written and directed by Shane Black, writer of *Letal Weapon* and other '90s action films full of smirking heroes and unbelievable action, *Kiss* is a winking deconstruction of exactly the type of film that made him rich. It merits multiple viewings. **A**

—Andy Mangels

The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo's life had more dramatic twists and turns than a John Grisham novel. From her beginnings as a brilliant, fearless little girl who liked to dress as a boy, to the horrific accident that made her a quasi-invalid all her life, to her tempestuous marriage to Diego Rivera and a remarkable painting career, this 90-minute documentary, narrated by Rita Moreno, provides the fullest visual portrait to date of Kahlo. Director Amy Stechler Burns interviews friends, associates, admirers and even a few ex-lovers (unfortunately no women, though) and includes extensive archival footage of Kahlo at work and play. In these amazing scenes, we see the bisexual artist working on a scaffold with Rivera, running around Paris and London, hobnobbing with Leon Trotsky and, in an

appropriately macabre touch, arriving by ambulance at a show of her work shortly before her death. Kahlo's commanding personality was as evident in her work—which is richly sampled here—as in her life, and both are exceptionally well-served by this film. Screens 4:30 p.m. Dec. 4 at Whitsell Auditorium. **A**

—Gary Morris

The Passenger

Thirty years after its original release, Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* returns to the big screen with a restored print. Don't miss this revival, because the film is not available on DVD. Jack Nicholson stars as a depressed reporter who switches identities with a dead man and grapples with his unexpectedly complicated new life with a little help from Maria Schneider of *Last Tango in Paris* fame. The performances are subtle and convincing, and some of the visuals are beautiful enough to stop your heart. But like *L'Avventura* and other Antonioni efforts, the pacing is positively snail-like at times. Opens Dec. 2 at Hollywood Theatre. **B+**

—Stephen Blair

Rent

There are so many moments of transcendent musical magic in the new screen adaptation of the smash Broadway hit that one hesitates to point out the film's flaws. Luckily, when *Rent* is good, it is so marvelous it makes up for the times it misses the mark.

Based on the Pulitzer- and Tony-winning musical

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