

film

Ellie Parker

This uneven and overlong comedy about a struggling Hollywood actress looks like it was filmed in one day on a budget of \$50. Naomi Watts does her damndest to keep the episodic plot chugging along, and at times her performance recalls her brilliant portrayal of an ambitious actress in *Mulholland Dr.* But the premise is so limited that the jokes dry up long before the final credits roll. Opens March 24 at Cinema 21. **C**

—Stephen Blair

Find Me Guilty

The newest courtroom drama from director Sidney Lumet (*12 Angry Men*, *The Verdict*) is based on the longest Mafia trial in U.S. history, when 20 members of the Lucchese crime family from New Jersey were prosecuted for more than 21 months in 1987 and 1988. It comes to its high point when the judge (Ron Silver) allows Giacomo "Jackie Dee" DiNorscio (Vin Diesel) to act as his own attorney. He gets a crash course from the lead defense attorney (Peter Dinklage) and turns the trial into a circus with his jokes. Annabella Sciorra is notable as DiNorscio's wife—even with only a few minutes on screen. At age 80, Lumet shows us that he can still shoot great movies; too bad he chose to celebrate a criminal. (The real DiNorscio died in November 2004, during the film's production.) **B**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

Freedom State

The chief interests in this indie from Portland gay writer/producer Aaron Kirk Douglas are the evocative photography and the beautiful Sauvie Island backgrounds. These qualities stand in stark contrast to the actual film. Focusing on a group of unconvincing, uninteresting "mental patients" who try to find survivors of the supposed end of the world, *Freedom State* is little more than a series of silly, stitched-together sketches featuring forgettable characters. Striving for quirkiness, eccentricity, endearing absurdity and droll humor, the film ultimately fails to engage, much less captivate. Plays 7 p.m. March 17 and 1 p.m. March 18 at Hollywood Theatre, plus 5 p.m. April 8 at Laurelhurst Theater as part of the Longbaugh Film Festival. **D**

—Gary Morris

The Hills Have Eyes

A family visits the desert of the American Southwest, not knowing that they're venturing into

the abandoned nuclear testing grounds that have spawned genetic freak hillbilly cannibals. After a bloody start, this remake makes you care about the family before death comes knocking, and the relentlessly grim and gory follow-through even carries some political messages. Too horrific for many audiences, this is recommended for thinking horror fans. **B**

—Andy Mangels

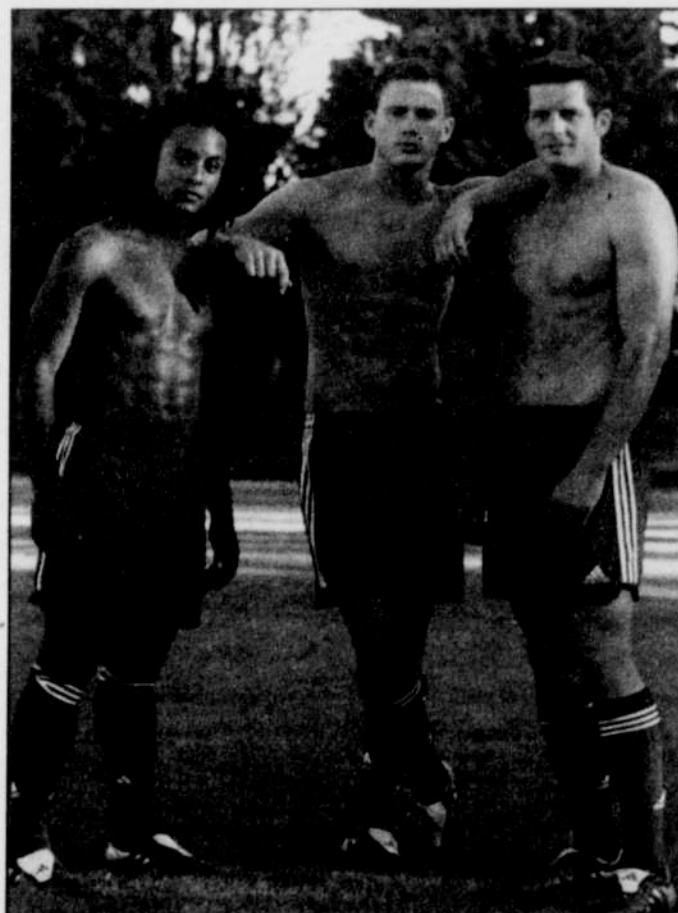
Inside Man

This action thriller with a stellar cast is a departure for director Spike Lee. The plot is hard to describe without spoiling the story: The film starts out with what looks like a perfect bank robbery with a hostage situation, but the viewer soon learns there is so much more to it. Denzel Washington stars as a tough New York detective who has to face a clever mastermind thief played by Clive Owen, and to give it yet another twist, Jodie Foster plays a power broker with a hidden agenda. Up to the end, this unpredictable film is entertaining and keeps you on your toes. Opens March 24. **B+**

—YPB

Manderlay

This is the second part of *Dancer in the Dark* director Lars von Trier's "USA Trilogy," which was



The eye candy (including Abercrombie & Fitch model Channing Tatum, center) is the only sweet thing about *She's the Man*.



A persecuted homosexual (Stephen Fry) strategizes with a young revolutionary (Natalie Portman) in *V for Vendetta*.

initiated with 2003's excellent *Dogville*. This time, the well-meaning and headstrong Grace (played by Nicole Kidman in *Dogville* and here by Bryce Dallas Howard) uses her power to impose unwanted democracy on an Alabama plantation that, even though the film is set in 1933, has upheld the despicable practice of African-American slavery. Is it an allegory of our country's current war? An unsparing examination of race and sex in the United States? Both? Whichever way you look at it, *Manderlay* is uncompromisingly true to von Trier's MO: It's unabashedly political; it could either piss you off or exhilarate you; and it's a bracing, excoriating, powerful experience. As in *Dogville*, John Hurt's unsettlingly mannered voice-over narration is a major character. Opens March 24 at Cinema 21. **A**

—Christopher McQuain

She's the Man

A soccer player (Amanda Bynes) poses as her twin brother to prove that girls kick ass in this teen-targeted update of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. As expected, "he" falls for "his" hunky roommate...who already has his eye on a girl...who has mistakenly fallen for our annoying drag king. The brain-dead script misses every opportunity to cash in on the wealth of potential queer humor staring the filmmakers in the face. **D-**

—Jim Radosta

Tsotsi

Filled with images of senseless violence and abject poverty, this Oscar winner isn't likely to boost tourism in South Africa. The title character is a young black gang member, thief and murderer who gets a shot at redemption when he discovers a baby in the back seat of a car he steals. Presley Chweneyagae is phenomenal in the complex lead role, convincing us that *Tsotsi* has the capacity for both unspeakable rage and heartfelt contrition.

Though there are some overly sentimental scenes toward the end, this is the most gripping coming-of-age film to come along in quite a while. Opens March 24. **A-**

—SB

V for Vendetta

Andy and Larry Wachowski (*The Matrix*) wrote this futuristic

thriller based on the graphic novel by David Lloyd about revolutionaries trying to topple a fascist government. Despite the topical subject matter, the thinly drawn protagonist (Natalie Portman) and her masked mentor (Hugo Weaving) make for uninspiring heroes. **B-**

—JR

When the Sea Rises

This romantic comedy is the writing/directing debut by French comedian Yolande Moreau (*Amélie*), who stars as a 45-year-old actress traveling with her one-woman show through small towns. She enjoys sleeping in different hotels every night and being on tour, and her family life is limited to nightly phone calls with her husband and child. When her car breaks down, a vagabond (Wim Willaert) fixes it for her and a tender romantic relationship develops between them. Beautiful cinematography by co-writer/co-director Gilles Porte. Opens March 17 at Hollywood Theatre. **A**

—YPB

Wordplay

Even before I moved from Germany to the United States, I heard about the famous crossword puzzle in *The New York Times*, but I really did not think too much about it until I watched this incredible documentary by Patrick Creadon. He takes an in-depth look into this crossword puzzle phenomenon and its longtime writer extraordinaire, Will Shortz. In his 12-year tenure with the paper, he has built a loyal fan base with people from all different backgrounds. *Wordplay* has wonderful interviews with celebrities who are addicted to his crossword puzzle like Ken Burns, Jon Stewart and the Indigo Girls, making a beautiful, entertaining portrait about different people who all share a favorite hobby. Plays 7 p.m. April 7 at Laurelhurst Theater as part of the Longbaugh Film Festival. **A**

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