

film

The Da Vinci Code

Director Ron Howard delivers a faithful but uninspired adaptation of Dan Brown's best-selling potboiler about a Harvard symbologist's quest for the Holy Grail. There's plenty of intrigue early on, including a self-flagellating albino monk and a dead body exhibit at the Louvre. Just when your pulse starts to race, convoluted dialogue and hokey historical re-enactments spoil the fun. It doesn't help that Tom Hanks and Audrey Tautou (*Amélie*) are less charismatic than cardboard in the leading roles. At least Sir Ian McKellen makes the most of his turn as a bitchy scholar. **C+**

—Stephen Blair

Down in the Valley

Set in that arid wasteland known as the San Fernando Valley, David Jacobson's strange, ambitious and ultimately unsatisfying film is equal parts *Romeo and Juliet*, *Taxi Driver* and *Unforgiven*. A menacing Edward Norton plays a smooth-talking cowboy who wins the heart of a wild teenage girl (*Thirteen*'s Evan Rachel Wood), then goes on a shooting spree that Billy the Kid would find excessive. The supporting cast is terrific, particularly David Morse and Rory Culkin as the girl's father and brother. But the romance, western and psychological thriller elements never come together convincingly. **B-**

—SB

Goal!

Just another sports movie about an underdog who fights the odds to follow his dream. The protagonist here is Santiago (Kuno Becker), a gifted soccer player who gets the chance of a lifetime when a former talent scout lets him try out for Newcastle United. Santiago needs to leave the barrio of Los Angeles to go to England and see if dreams can come true. It will be interesting to see if a movie about soccer can make it in a country where football is much more popular. **B**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

Just My Luck

How you feel about this movie is surely all in the eye of the beholder. While I think Lindsay Lohan has potential as an actress, this romantic comedy from director Donald Petrie (*How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*) was not a good choice. Lohan

plays Ashley, the luckiest person in New York. But her luck changes when she meets Jake (Chris Pine), the unluckiest person in New York. The incidents that follow could and should be funny, but they turn out to be really dumb and disgusting. Whatever happened to good, tasteful slapstick? **D**

—YPB

Mission: Impossible III

Tom Cruise returns as agent Ethan Hunt in the third installment of this spy movie series. Directed and co-written by J.J. Abrams (*Lost*, *Alias*), the film has exactly what you would expect: new gadgets, lots of explosions, a juicy villain (Philip Seymour Hoffman) and a great supporting cast (Ving Rhames, Billy Crudup, Michelle Monaghan, Jonathan Rhys Meyers and Laurence Fishburne). *M.I.:III* leaves the audience hardly any time to breathe between the action-packed scenes, which help mask the fact that the movie is lacking a great story. **B+**

—YPB

Moonlight

This is the fourth feature film from Dutch director Paula van der Oest (2003 Academy Award nominee for *Zus & Zo*). A young boy from Afghanistan is used as human packaging material to smuggle cocaine, then something goes wrong and he is found wounded by a teenage girl who decides to hide and take care of him. While the film starts off promising, the second half contains a series of weird incidents as the kids flee from drug dealers who find out the boy is still alive. Opens May 19 at Hollywood Theatre. **C+**

—YPB

Mountain Patrol

This visually stunning and unsettling film dramatizes real events that transpired in the 1990s. In a remote region of China, Tibetan patrolmen risk their lives to chase down the poachers responsible for driving the Tibetan antelope toward extinction. Apart from the greedy and trigger-happy poachers, they face dehydration, quicksand and snowstorms. Given the recent success of nature films like *Winged Migration* and *March of the Penguins*, this *National Geographic* release stands a good chance of being an arthouse hit this summer. Opens May 19 at Cinema 21. **A-**

—SB



"This career will self-destruct in five seconds...."

Poseidon

The plot of this remake of the 1972 disaster classic has more holes than the ill-fated cruise liner, which, in this version, is capsized by a "rogue wave," whatever that is. Yet, despite cringe-inducing dialogue and fake-looking computer-generated special effects, *Poseidon* still manages to thrill. Richard Dreyfuss plays gay, and the crying kid is terrific, but no one in the lackluster cast comes close to Shelley Winters. **C+**

—Floyd Sklaver

Sketches of Frank Gehry

This film offers wonderful insight into the life of an extraordinary architect, Frank O. Gehry, whose buildings include the Experience Music Project in Seattle and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles and who even has been portrayed on *The Simpsons*. In his first feature-length documentary, Sydney Pollack (*Tootsie*, *Out of Africa*) follows his friend Gehry for a period of five years. He concentrates merely on the creation of Gehry's sketches and his initial designs, then explores the process of turning these drawings into three-dimensional models and into finished buildings of titanium and glass, concrete and steel, wood and stone. Opens May 26 at Cinema 21. **A**

—YPB

United 93

British director Paul Greengrass (*Bloody Sunday*) wrote and directed this intelligent and gut-wrenching account of 9/11, focusing on events aboard the one hijacked plane that did not reach its target. From the mounting chaos in the air traffic control room to the heroic retaliatory efforts of the passengers, Greengrass builds an almost unbearable amount of tension without sensationalizing the material. Mark Bingham—a gay rugby player who was on the flight—helps lead the charge against the terrorists. **A-**

—SB

Wah-Wah

Based on true events from actor/director Richard E. Grant's childhood, this coming-of-age drama takes place at the end of the '60s when Swaziland is about to receive independence from Great Britain. Young Ralph (Zach Fox and Nicholas Hoult) witnesses the breakdown of his parents' marriage and deals with his father's alcoholism and hasty remarriage. The movie has the right combination of gritty family conflict mixed in with stunning African scenery and a portrait of latter-day British imperial pretensions. Opens May 26. **B+**

—YPB

Water

Set in the 1930s during India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule, this movie from director Deepa Mehta (*Bollywood/Hollywood*) has visually stunning cinematography with vivid colors and a great soundtrack that suits every emotion of the story. It follows the lives of two women: Chuyia, who is deposited in a house of Hindu widows after her husband dies, and Kalyani, who falls in love with a Mahatma Gandhi follower from a lower caste. *Water* gives both an insight into the beauty of the country and the viciousness of some cultural norms. **A**

—YPB

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