



Hours: Mon-Fri open @11:00am
Sat and Sun open @3:30pm

St. Valentine's Day is
Wednesday, February 14th.

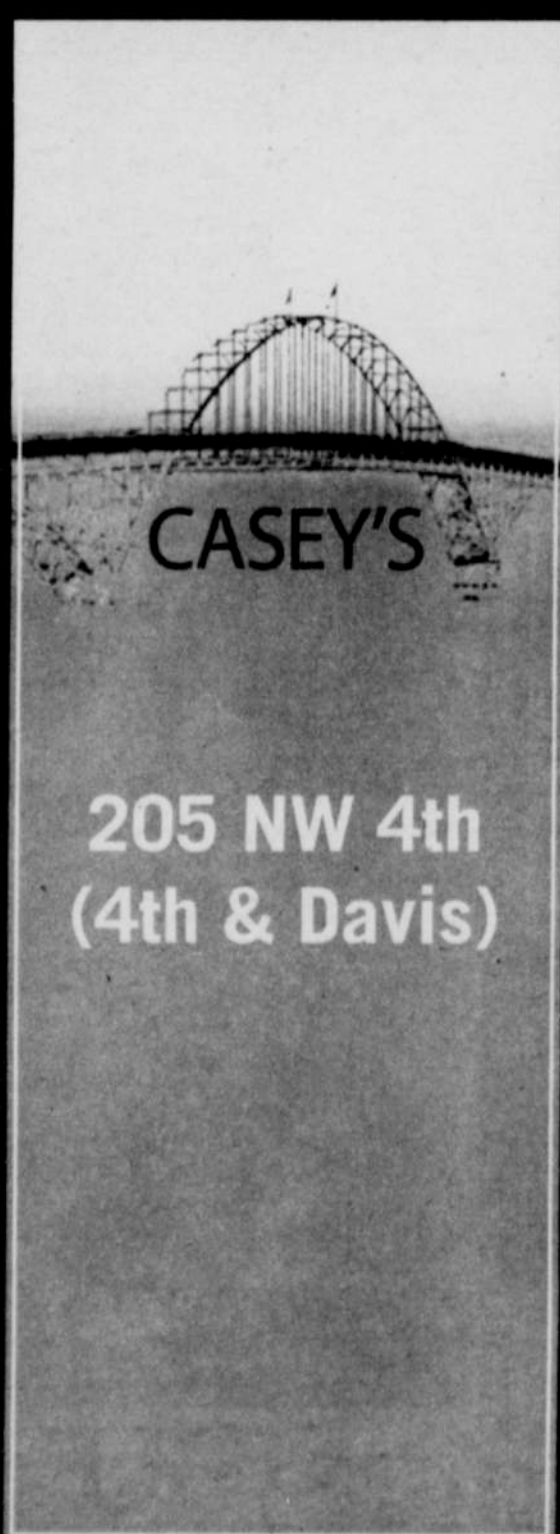
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film

Away from Her

Canadian actress Sarah Polley (*The Sweet Hereafter*) makes her directing debut with this heart-breaking adaptation of a short story by Alice Munro. Still radiant at 65, Julie Christie plays an Alzheimer's patient who, to her husband's dismay, develops an intimate bond with a man at her residential care facility. Some of the opening scenes feel choppy, but Polley finds her rhythm and admirably avoids the disease movie clichés that a lesser talent would undoubtedly heap on this material. Gordon Pinsent, Olympia Dukakis and Michael Murphy round out the cast. Screens Feb. 11 and 12 at the Portland International Film Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **A-**

—Stephen Blair

Because I Said So

Director Michael Lehmann's (*The Truth About Cats and Dogs*) romantic comedy is predictable and at times funny and even verges on slapstick, but it only keeps your attention because of the superb Diane Keaton. She plays a mother trying to find the right man for her youngest daughter (Mandy Moore) via an Internet ad. Gabriel Macht (*The Good Shepherd*) is quite charming as one of the prospective suitors. This movie is only a platform for Moore, and I am not won over by her as a singer nor an actress. In the future, I sure hope Keaton won't be typecast in these "funny mother" roles. **B-**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

Blood and Chocolate

Take a novel by Poppy Z. Brite or Anne Rice, replace vampires with werewolves and writing talent with cinematic clichés, and you have *Blood and Chocolate*. Some of the special effects are pleasing to the eye, but the plot could be an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*: A girl (Agnes Bruckner) who belongs to a secret outcast society of humans able to turn into wolves at will falls in love with a handsome starving artist (Hugh Dancy) who threatens her allegiance to her territorial tribe. It might delight teenage fans of vapid graphic novels, but will inspire the wrong kind of laughter in a discriminating filmgoer. **C-**

—Tony le Tigre

Catch and Release

After seeing the trailer for this movie, I wasn't expecting much more than a silly, flat romantic comedy, but director/writer Susannah Grant (*Erin Brockovich*) did surprise me with this well-done and quite entertaining story about a girl (Jennifer Garner, always a pleasure to watch) who tries to get her life back together after her fiancé dies on the day before their wedding. While she discovers the secrets of his past, she gets support from his friends. Yes, the film is predictable and doesn't take any new approaches to the genre, but with a lot of humor and a splendid supporting cast, it was a pleasant experience. There might be even a new leading man on the horizon in Timothy Olyphant (TV's *Deadwood*), and I had

forgotten how charming Kevin Smith (*Chasing Amy*) can be. (By the way, he produced *Small Town Gay Bar*, which was screened at last year's Portland queer film festival). **B**

—YPB

The Hitcher

A remake of the low-budget atmospheric 1986 thriller, *The Hitcher* is almost a shot-for-shot doppelgänger of its predecessor. The main difference is that this time it's a guy and his girlfriend who pick up a murderously clever hitchhiker, instead of a guy and the girl he meets halfway through the film. While it might not sound like a big change, this removes most of the creepy homoerotic overtones that made the first film so scary for mainstream audiences. The new *Hitcher* is competent and gorier, but much less gay. **B-**

—Andy Mangels

The Lives of Others

Winner of Best Film honors at the 2006 European Film Awards, this is a bleak and compelling feature debut from writer/director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. In East Berlin in the mid-1980s, a secret service agent finds himself emotionally entangled in the lives of the politically subversive artists he's spying on. The acting is solid, and the suspense builds to a nail-biting climax. The conclusion, alas, is tedious and mushy. Screens Feb. 9 at the Portland International Film Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **B+**

—SB

Shinobi: Heart Under Blade

Historical Asian action movies are like jazz standards—they're different versions of the same song. The point is to appreciate interpretations on a basic theme. *Shinobi: Heart Under Blade* is one of these, a tale of war between rival Ninja villages in 1614 Japan, and the star-crossed love story between the young man and woman in charge of those villages. Supernatural battle scenes and honorable rivalries share screen time with a tender, doomed romance, but ultimately there's nothing new going on here except fresh,

pretty faces and inventive computer graphics. You could do worse. Opens Feb. 9 at Hollywood Theatre. **C+**

—Jemiah Jefferson

Smokin' Aces

Whatever flaws you can find with *Smokin' Aces*, the second film by writer/director Joe Carnahan, you can't say it's boring: This movie magnetizes your eyes from beginning to end through sheer brutality. It's a cool, stylish crime thriller with an overly thickened plot set in a hypothetical near future when the FBI has whittled the Mafia down to one remaining padrone (shades of Quentin Tarantino, Guy Ritchie and *The Usual Suspects*). If you can tolerate the bloodbath, you will actually enjoy the film, with its star-studded cast, witty script and superb performances by nearly everyone, especially Taraji P. Henson as a lesbian contract killer in love with her colleague, Alicia Keys. The glamorized violence is leavened somewhat by Jeremy Piven as the film's central character, Las Vegas entertainer and mob-darling-turned-informant Buddy "Aces" Israel, and a hilarious cameo by Jason Bateman as an impotent, alcoholic bail bondsman who has no qualms about wearing a skimpy bikini to bed. **B**

—TLT

Venus

This deeply moving British film is brilliantly written, with humorous and wonderful performances by a cast that includes Peter O'Toole, Leslie Phillips and Vanessa Redgrave. Roger Mitchell (*Notting Hill*) directed this story of two veteran actors whose lives are turned upside down with the arrival of a live-in nurse (newcomer Jodie Whittaker, who holds her own against these screen legends). A plot involving an older man hitting on a 20-something girl sounds controversial, and the film has its uncomfortable moments, but in the end it addresses this issue with ease and finesse. Some film trivia: O'Toole, a seven-time Academy Award nominee who has never won, considered refusing a 2003 honorary Oscar because he believes he can still win a proper one—so chances are good that he will get it this year. **B+**

—YPB jo



King and the Clown, which has been called "the Korean *Brokeback Mountain*," screens Feb. 10 and 13 at the Portland International Film Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org.