

film

Backstage

French actress/director Emmanuelle Bercot's drama stars Emmanuelle Seigner as pop diva Lauren Waks, who takes in adoring groupie Lucie (a very believable Isild Le Besco) and makes her part of her entourage. With that, she pulls the totally obsessed fan into her search for love and happiness, with Lucie trying to fix Lauren's dysfunctional life by developing a self-destructive plan to bring her back together with her ex-boyfriend. Unfortunately, the film seems a little long. Opens Feb. 23 at Hollywood Theatre. **C+**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

Breaking and Entering

After proving his talent as a screenwriter and director with *The English Patient*, Anthony Minghella racked up rave reviews and Oscar nominations for a pair of ambitious but thoroughly mediocre films (*The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Cold Mountain*). It's hard to believe that the charade will continue with *Breaking and Entering*, a dull and remote character study that robs its viewers of two hours and squanders the considerable talents of Jude Law, Juliette Binoche and Robin Wright Penn. Law plays a London architect who has an affair with the Bosnian mother (Binoche) of a teenage boy who burgled his offices. **C**

—Stephen Blair

Bridge to Terabithia

Based on the children's novel by Katherine Paterson, this movie by director Gabor Csupo (*Rugrats Go Wild*) tells the story of Jess, whose goal is to outrun everybody in his school, until he loses to his new next-door neighbor—a girl named Leslie. Despite their differences, they become friends and create a magic kingdom in the woods called Terabithia. But one morning a tragic accident befalls Leslie, and Jess has to deal with the grief and anger in the aftermath. The film has great visual effects, and both child actors are wonderful. This is a movie for the whole family; read the book if you haven't yet! **A-**

—YPB

Dreaming by the Numbers

Amsterdam resident Anna Bucchetti goes back to her native Italy to direct this quirky black-and-white documentary about Naples residents who rely on dreams and premonitions when they play games of chance. We meet a lottery player who tries to determine the numerological significance of his dream about a cockroach, and a woman with

Mafia ties who mourns the death of her grandson. The funniest sequences feature a bawdy transsexual who runs an illegal bingo parlor in her apartment, freely flinging insults at her female patrons. Screens Feb. 17, 18 and 22 at the Portland International Film Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **B**

—SB

The Guatemalan Handshake

Like a kinder, gentler *Gummo*, this strange, lyrical film explores the life of those left behind by society without being dark and exploitative. At first glance the story takes place in a small Midwestern town of carnivals and demolition derbies, but its citizens are the sort of people who only exist in the minds of hipster filmmakers. Everything about *The Guatemalan Handshake* puzzles. What does the title have to do with anything? Why is the main character, Donald Turnupseed (Will Oldham), named after the guy involved in the 1955 car crash that killed James Dean? It's a wonderfully quirky and original indie flick but somehow adds up to less than the sum of its parts. Opens Feb. 17 at Hollywood Theatre. **B**

—Tony le Tigre

Hannibal Rising

Remember how disappointed you were with the *Star Wars* prequels, especially Hayden Christensen's wimpy Darth Vader? Here's another iconic villain given the requisite "sympathetic" makeover prequel, as we learn how Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter came to be. It's a poor stew of Nazis, revenge, bad French accents, samurai swords and improbable coincidences. Were he real, Lecter would surely torment the filmmakers in some *Grand Guignol* style, probably forcing them to watch *Hannibal Rising* over and over until they ate their own livers...with no added fava beans or chianti. **D**

—Andy Mangels

The Host

If you only see one movie this year about a huge river monster that comes on land to devour people, make it this thrilling and inventive import from South Korea. A cheeky critique of American environmental policies, it shows how the ferocious mutant owes its life to a U.S. Army base that dumped dusty bottles of formaldehyde down the drain. Director Jooh-ho Bong strikes a perfect balance between scares and laughs, drawing inspiration from legitimate horror classics like *Alien* and schlocky B movies like



Jude Law's considerable talents are squandered in Anthony Minghella's *Breaking and Entering*.

The Blob. Screens Feb. 17 and 19 at the Portland International Film Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **A**

—SB

The Messengers

When a family moves into an abandoned house in the country, evil spirits begin to wreak havoc. But what secret is hiding in...the sunflowers? Call it *The Farm-ityville Horror*—this fright flick has nothing to do with its generic title and contains few scares other than the standard animal-jumping-out-at-you trope. Not poorly acted nor poorly shot, *The Messengers* is just boring enough to induce catatonia. **C+**

—AM

The Method

This Spanish film starts off as a biting satire of corporate greed, then inexplicably morphs into a screwball comedy that isn't particularly funny. While an anti-globalization protest rages in the streets of Madrid, five men and two women match wits in a series of mind games that determine who gets a job. The acting is solid, and the crafty cinematography makes the most of the drab office setting. It's a shame that director Marcelo Piñeyro abandons the menacing tone of the first hour for a silly and heavy-handed conclusion. Screens Feb. 19 and 22 at the Portland International Film Festival; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **B-**

—SB

Music and Lyrics

Marc Lawrence (*Two Weeks Notice*) wrote and directed this teen-skewing romantic comedy about an '80s pop star (Hugh Grant) who gets a chance at a comeback when a Britney Spears clone (newcomer Haley Bennett) asks him to write a duet for them. The only drawback: He has never written lyrics to a song, so he hires an offbeat younger woman (Drew Barrymore) to help him out. While I am a sucker for chick flicks and always think Barrymore is charming, Grant is now really too old for this kind of role. **B-**


—YPB

Short Cuts III: Made in Portland

The 30th Portland International Film Festival includes four programs of short films, including nine entries from local filmmakers. One of the highlights is "Scaredycat," a 13-minute documentary by gay director Andrew Blubaugh ("Hello, Thanks"). One night in September 2004, a gang of five men attacked Blubaugh as he crossed the Steel Bridge. Although impaired by fear, some racial prejudice and a lifelong bout with obsessive-compulsive disorder, he contacted his assailants in jail to try to make sense of the situation. Even with the expert input of a local lawyer and a Portland State University psychology professor, some of the findings are a little simplistic. Still, the skillful combination of interviews, dramatic re-enactments and animated sequences makes for compelling viewing. Screens Feb. 18; for details visit www.nwfilm.org. **B+**

—SB

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