

film

The Darjeeling Limited

With all due respect to the disarming whimsy of *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, this railroad romp is Wes Anderson's most rewarding and heartfelt effort since *Rushmore*. The pacing is pokey at times, and some of the eccentricity feels forced. But Adrien Brody, Owen Wilson and Jason Schwartzman have terrific chemistry as a bedraggled trio of brothers who rehash their dysfunctional family history while traveling across India by train. The set designs are charming, and Anderson veterans Bill Murray and Anjelica Huston have amusing cameos. Opens Oct. 12. **B+**

—Stephen Blair

Dedication

Henry Roth (Billy Crudup) is a children's book author whose best-selling character, Marty the Beaver, was inspired by a visit to a porno theater. He's a chronically single, OCD mess of a manchild who spends his free time watching Japanese monster movies and pushing away anyone who gets too close to him. But when his best friend and surrogate father figure (Tom Wilkinson) dies of a brain tumor, Roth is forced to overcome his social phobias to join forces (and, ultimately, torsos) with a beautiful and empathic young illustrator (played with surprising appeal by Mandy Moore). Poor puffy-faced Dianne Wiest fares worse as Moore's hysterical mother. **B-**

—Tony LeTigre

Eastern Promises

Two years after their triumphant collaboration on *A History of Violence*, maverick director David Cronenberg and Viggo Mortensen have teamed up to concoct one of the most accomplished and brutal mob movies in recent memory. The entire cast is impeccable, with Naomi Watts as a London midwife who unwittingly entangles herself in a Russian crime syndicate. Mortensen hits a career high as the menacing yet sympathetic Nikolai, showing jaw-dropping dedication to his craft by extinguishing cigarettes on his tongue and fighting a bloody brawl in the buff. Steven Knight, an Oscar nominee for *Dirty Pretty Things*, wrote the intricate screenplay. **A**

—SB

The Game Plan

Andy Fickman (*She's the Man*) directs charming Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson as NFL quarterback Joe Kingman, who has the perfect game plan to win the championship till he runs into a little problem:

his 7-year-old daughter from a previous relationship (wonderfully played by Madison Pettis). His perfect bachelor life will now undergo a lot of changes. This funny and witty Disney film offers classic, clean-cut family entertainment. **B+**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival

Chances are you are familiar with H.P. Lovecraft's works, a combination of fantasy, horror and science fiction from the early 1900s. Writing in a time of immense scientific discoveries, Lovecraft spun tales of cosmic horrors, tentacled uncaring gods, aggressive alien forms and species from under the sea. The H.P. Lovecraft Festival, now in its 12th year, showcases the far-reaching influence of his writing through cinematic interpretations and scholarly contemplation. After watching films such as John Carpenter's classic *The Thing* to the recent *Cthulhu* (a gay spin on Lovecraft's short story "The Shadow Over Innsmouth"), you'll be one step closer to understanding all the talk of Outer versus Elder gods, the Great Old Ones and colors from outer space. There's even a Mall of Cthulhu where you can purchase your very own cuddly Azathoth. Once you're ready to join the cult, be sure you're able to chant *Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'yeh wgah'naglfhtagn*—just don't drink the green Kool-Aid.

The H.P. Lovecraft Festival runs through Oct. 7 at Hollywood Theatre. For more information visit www.hplfilmfestival.com.

—Anabel Ramirez

Into the Wild

Sean Penn finally hits his stride as a director with this thoroughly engrossing biopic about a recent college graduate (Emile Hirsch, delivering a remarkable performance reminiscent of River Phoenix) who sells all of his possessions and drops out of society to roam across the continent, meeting a string of richly drawn characters along the way. On the surface it would seem that the outspoken liberal filmmaker has steered clear of politics here, but in reality his protagonist's inner/outer journey makes a radically anti-American statement: Put simply, the best things in life are not things. **A+**

—Jim Radosta

The Kingdom

Inspired by a 2003 compound bombing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, director Peter Berg (*Friday Night Lights*) transforms that incident into a story



Sean Penn directs Emile Hirsch in *Into the Wild*, an excellent adventure partially filmed in Oregon.

that touches on culture clashes, forensic revelations, kidnapping, religious doctrine and the self-perpetuation of hate. FBI Special Agent Ronald Fleury (Jamie Foxx) quickly assembles an elite team (Chris Cooper, Jennifer Garner and Jason Bateman) to fly to the Middle East and find who was behind that attack. A well-executed action film with a political twist. **B**

—YPB

Safe

It might seem paradoxical that the finest film in queer cinema-maestro Todd Haynes' impressive oeuvre is one that scarcely mentions queers at all. But it is difficult to imagine *Safe* coming from the imagination of anyone who had not had Haynes' experiences as a queer activist during some fairly dark times for the cause. (Before moving to Portland, he was involved in ACT UP at the height of the oppressive Reagan years, the time during which *Safe* is set.)

The film recounts the mysterious misfortune of Carol White (frequent Haynes collaborator Julianne Moore, in her first leading role), an upper-middle-class housewife living in a vast McMansion outside Los Angeles. Carol unquestioningly, even numbly, adheres to a typical routine for one of her role and class—picking up dry cleaning, serving dinner to her ad-exec husband and stepchild, going to aerobics class, obsessing over interior decoration, etc., all of which we see in remarkably restrained, beautifully composed, almost real-time sequences at the film's beginning—until she gradually but inexorably begins to fall ill.

As her apparently undiagnosable malady worsens, and the best health care that her plentiful resources can afford fail to assist her, she comes across a flier for a New-Agey rural retreat for the "environmentally ill." An impending state of irresolvable crisis in her health compels her to set off for an indefinite stay at this retreat, where the residents are subtly coaxed into a kind of magical thinking that makes them culpable in their illnesses.

Haynes' brilliant concept is matched by his clearly preternatural understanding of the medium. Every visual and aural aspect of the film, along with Moore's superlatively intelligent performance, perfectly evokes for the viewer the blank serenity of Carol White's life: This is a woman with only the most tenuous, vague sense of who she is. Her illness is never explained, because it is not really the film's point; rather, *Safe* is about the problem of identity (a recurring theme in Haynes' work) and the ways in which something physiological like an illness might come to be understood and incorporated as part of one's identity, and even be made to seem like a moral issue. *Safe* movingly revivifies the meaning of the activist slogan "silence=death" (which could be simply but correctly stated as the film's thesis) by illustrating it in a most unlikely yet powerful way—a way that, subversively, implicates the most apparently immune, "normal" part of society.

Screens 7 p.m. Oct. 6 as part of the Northwest Film Center's *Eco-Sicko* series. Schedule permitting, Haynes will introduce the film. **A+**

—Christopher McQuain 10

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