



Watchmen exceeds expectations.

Sandra (Vinessa Shaw), but at the same time he gets infatuated by self-destructive Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow). This deeply affecting, character-driven story asks the question, "Do you choose the one you love or the one who loves you?" Isabella Rossellini is superb as Leonard's mother. *Two Lovers* also showcases Phoenix's remarkable talent; hopefully he will find his way back to acting instead of being the butt of Oscar jokes. Opens March 6 at Cinema 21. **B**

—Yvonne P. Behrens

»Watchmen

Count me among those who waited with trepidation to see what the cinematic version of this revered comic book would be. After all, when it was first released in 1986 and 1987, I was a comic store retailer and foisted this on customers as one of the best and most adult deconstructions of superheroes ever created. *Watchmen* has held that distinction in most critics' minds ever since and had become, in Hollywood terms, "unfilmable." With a dense, multilayered story, flashbacks about every character, plot elements that played with time and space, and a nihilistic and dark worldview, could *Watchmen* ever be faithfully—or even semi-reasonably—translated to film? Especially by Zack Snyder, who directed the *Dawn of the Dead* remake and *300*?

The comfort to the fears of the faithful is that the *Watchmen* movie is everything they could hope to see and more. It is extraordinarily faithful not just to Alan Moore's original writing but to Dave Gibbons' art

and designs as well. Snyder's style replicates the look and feel of a dynamic comic book while using camera tricks and occasional slow motion to capture iconic action images. The cast is significantly strong, especially Billy Crudup as Dr. Manhattan, a quantum-powered superman losing his grip on his own humanity, and Jackie Earle Haley as the violent vigilante Rorschach, who lost his humanity decades ago.

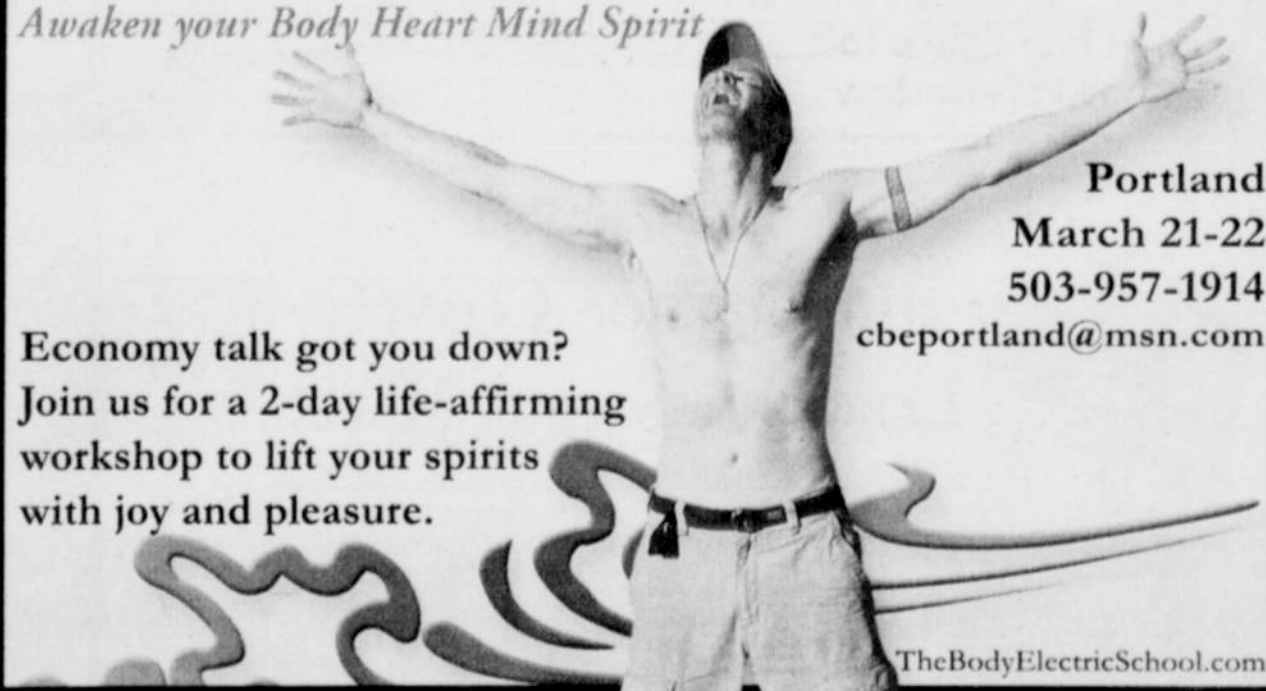
For those unfamiliar with the story, the year is 1985, and the world has had costumed adventurers since World War II (including a lesbian one, briefly seen). But the arrival of an actual superpowered being, Dr. Manhattan, has changed everything, from the outcome of the Vietnam War to the delicate balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union. Now, with the world at the brink of nuclear destruction, the savage murder of one of the heroes—the Comedian—leads Rorschach and others to search for someone who may be hunting them, even as Dr. Manhattan may have decided to leave mankind to destroy itself as he seeks peace on Mars.

The film is grim and depressing—and long—which will likely limit the appeal to mainstream cinema audiences. But for those looking for a lengthy movie that feels so full of story that it could be even longer, filled with characters both dazzling to view and disturbing to psychoanalyze, *Watchmen* will bring a smile...and the knowledge, as in 1986, that the very concept of superheroes has fundamentally been changed. **A**

—AM JO

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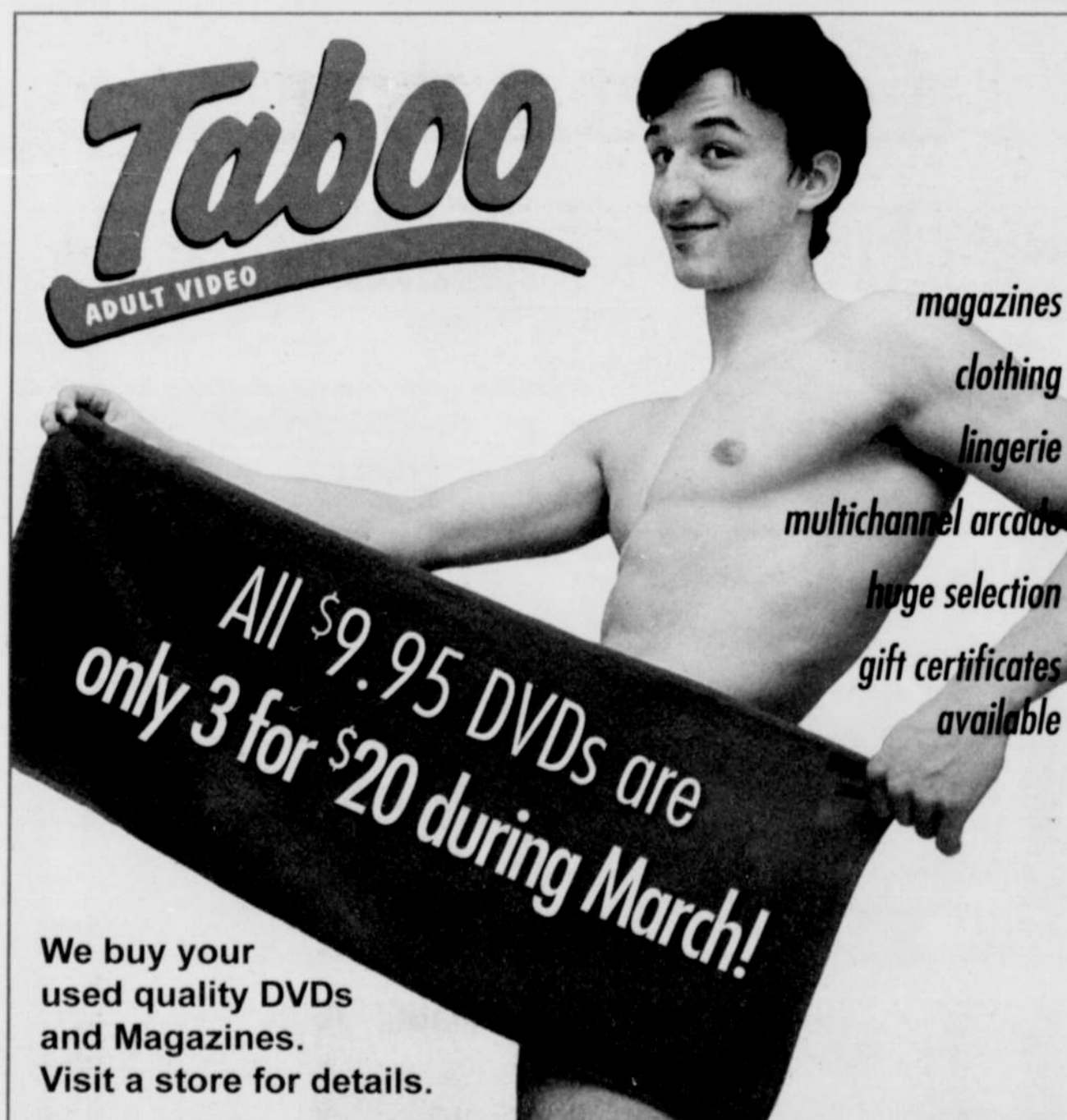
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