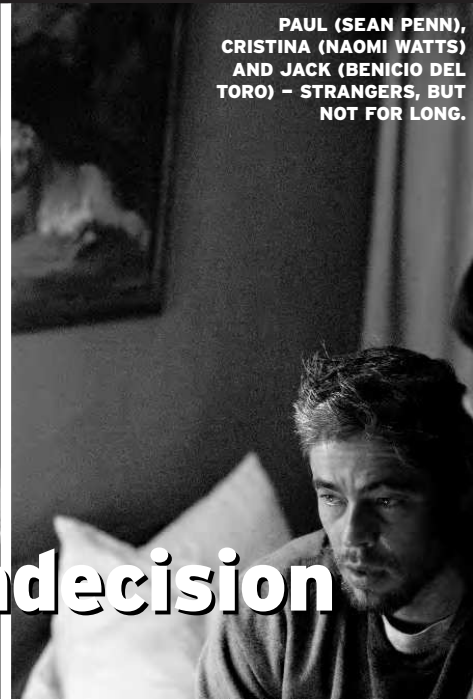
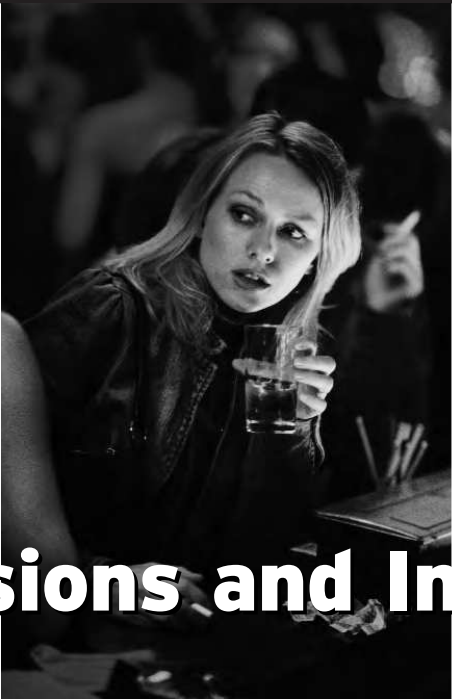
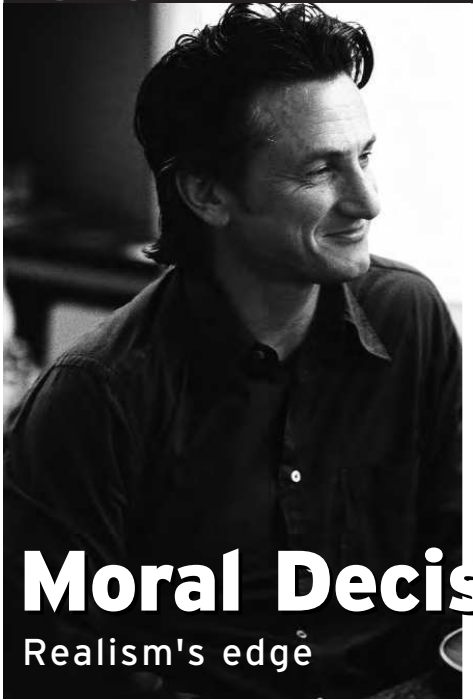




PAUL (SEAN PENN), CRISTINA (NAOMI WATTS) AND JACK (BENICIO DEL TORO) – STRANGERS, BUT NOT FOR LONG.

FOCUS FEATURES, 2003.

Moral Decisions and Indecision

Realism's edge

TWENTY-ONE GRAMS: Directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu. Written by Guillermo Arriaga. Produced by Alejandro González Iñárritu, Robert Salerno. Executive producer, Ted Hope. Cinematography, Rodrigo Prieto. Production design, Brigitte Broch. Editor, Stephen Mirrione. Costumes, Marlene Stewart. Music, Gustavo Santaolalla. Starring Sean Penn (Paul Rivers), Naomi Watts (Cristina Peck), Benicio Del Toro (Jack Jordan) and Melissa Leo (Marianne Jordan), with Charlotte Gainsbourg (Mary Rivers), Danny Huston (Michael Williams), Clea DuVall (Claudia Williams), Eddie Marsan (Reverend John). Focus Features Release, 2003. R. 125 minutes.

Second films are a challenge to directors such as Alejandro González Iñárritu, whose *Amores Perros* took by surprise the film industry, critics and filmgoers alike. Trouble is, it's hard to be shockingly original second time around. Some people will love what the director does with *Twenty-One Grams*, while others will find something to carp

about. But no one will let him off the hook easily. Can-do filmmakers live and die by these rules.

Cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto (*Frida, 8 Mile, Amores Perros*) adds heightened momentum and immediacy to the film with his hand-held camera work. Intimate shots work really well, and the result, as he describes it is "textured — realism, but with an edge."

For fans who care, Iñárritu's second feature film is innovative in new ways. It is a sobering look at the effects of a fatal accident on those who thereafter are bound together unconsciously. It is a film that plays loose and reckless with time and story. You never exactly know where you are on the Mobius strip of *Twenty-One Grams*. To further complicate the film's deliberate, dissociated narrative structure,

we are plunged directly into the action, with no established context. I was confused by the superficial physical similarity between two male characters as well, one of whom dies before we get to know him.

The acting is first-rate, and actors live for meaty roles like these. Because the film is about life, death and the liminal space between the living and the dead, the film contains only a few truly happy moments. But it shows a hard-earned compassion that only some characters attain.

Paul Rivers (Sean Penn) is a college prof with a bad heart. Jack Jordan (Benicio Del Toro) is a former convict now born again; a man who places all his hope in God. Cristina Peck (Naomi Watts) is a former coke-addict who came back from the dead to have two children with a

man she loves. Paul, Cristina and Jack do not know each other before the tragedy, only afterwards when one of them needs to know.

Mary Rivers (Charlotte Gainsbourg) is willing to have surgery to have Paul's child, but their relationship is not stable. Marianne Jordan (Melissa Leo) hopes Jack will be less stressed and more forgiving with the kids. Claudia (Clea DuVall) longs to help her older sister, Cristina, but finds herself shut out of Cristina's life.

The most interesting aspect of the main characters' difficult stories is how little we know ourselves and how difficult real change is. Paul gets a heart transplant, but his bad habits remain implacable, such as smoking. Jack believes his faith will carry him through any crisis, but it doesn't, although it serves him to do the right thing. Earlier, Cristina realizes the futility of vengeance, but later she is lost and vulnerable to such ideas.

You cannot be passive with a movie like this; it requires that you bring your active awareness. I will see the film again, because the fractured narrative needs to be seen twice to create linear story lines. I'm willing to give Iñárritu a second chance to show he knows what he is doing here. And I also plan to pay more attention to images such as the empty motel swimming pool the director returns to over and again. Finally, I need to see Del Toro's performance again, because it is pretty amazing. Likewise, Watts makes an indelible impression and I'd like to see how she does it. Relative to his role in *Mystic River*, Penn gives a quieter, more nuanced performance here. But he is never less than excellent.

Twenty-One Grams opens Friday Dec. 26 at the Bijou. Very highest recommendations. **EW**

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING: Listing is incomplete at press time. It contains only films opening Dec. 25 or later at Bijou and Cinema World. Please consult theater websites (see ad on opposite page) or phone numbers for more information.

Cheaper By the Dozen: A remake of the Clifton Webb classic from the 1950s, Shawn Levy's version boasts a new screenplay and stars Steve Martin as the father of 12, who moves his family to the city. Bonnie Hunt plays the kids' mother. PG. Cinema World.

Cold Mountain: Anthony Minghella's screen rendition of Charles Frazier's Civil War best-seller stars Jude Law as a wounded Southern soldier walking home across the mountains, Nicole Kidman as his pre-war sweetheart, and Renee Zellweger as a young drifter who teaches her to farm and survive. R. Opens Dec. 25. Cinema World.

In America: Jim Sheridan's memoir of living in New York in 1981 with his wife and two daughters. Stars Samantha Morton, Paddy Considine, Sarah Bolger and Emma Bolger. Highest recommendations. PG-13. Opens Dec. 25 at the Bijou. See review this issue.

Paycheck: Based on a Philip K. Dick sci-fi short story and directed by John Woo, film stars Ben Affleck, Uma Thurman Aaron Eckhart, Paul Giamatti, Colm Feore, Michael C. Hall. PG-13. Cinema World.

Peter Pan: Yet another version of J. M. Barrie's classic adventure story of the best bad boy ever, Peter Pan, makes its way to the big screen. Directed by P.J. Hogan, movie stars Jason Isaacs, Jeremy Sumpter, Richard Briers, Olivia Williams, Lyn Redgrave, Ludvine Sagnier and Rachel Hurd-Wood. PG. Cinema World.

Twenty-one Grams: Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu's second feature has astounded critics. Telling three linked stories, Iñárritu again works magic with narrative structure. Sean Penn, Benicio Del Toro and Naomi Watts, star in a film *The New York Times* says reaches a "Faulknerian idea of old-fashioned grace." Also stars Charlotte Gainsbourg, Clea DuVall, Danny Huston and Melissa Leo. R. Opens Dec. 26 at Bijou. See review this issue.

CONTINUING: Listing for continuing films is incomplete at press time.

Some films listed may have left town or moved to another theater. Please consult theater websites (see ad on opposite page) or phone numbers. Archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com.

Bad Santa: Directed by Terry Zwigoff. The story of two con men who go on a road trip to malls dressed as Santa and his elf. Rather than spread good cheer, the duo robs each establishment — a strategy that becomes complicated when they encounter an 8-year-old who teaches them the true meaning of Christmas. Stars Billy Bob Thornton, Bernie Mac, Lauren Graham, John Ritter. Cinemark.

Brother Bear: Disney tale of young man who is transformed into a bear and his adventures in the great Northwest. He picks up a bear cub and runs into a pair of misguided moose, or is that meese? Six new songs from Phil Collins, including one with Tina Turner. G. Movies 12.

Cat in the Hat, The: Mike Meyers stars as the outrageous feline who visits a couple of kids and wreaks havoc in the house while mom's away. Live-action comedy based on beloved Dr. Seuss book. Many parents and many kids can recite it by heart. With Alec Baldwin, Kelly Preston. PG-13. Cinemark.

Duplex: Drew Barrymore and Ben Stiller find their Manhattan dream flat but inherit a batty old woman who lives upstairs and drives them nuts. Directed by Danny DeVito, cast also includes Swoosie Kurtz and Harvey Fierstein. PG-13. Movies 12.

Elf: Jon Favreau directs Will Ferrell as a human child raised as an elf. Mr. Claus (Ed Asner) and his chief assistant (Bob Newhart) send the lad to New York to find his biological father (James Caan). With Zooey Deschanel and Mary Steenburgen. PG. Cinemark.

Freaky Friday: Jamie Lee Curtis, Lindsay Lohan, Mark Harmon, Harold Gould, Chad Michael Murray, Stephen Tobolowsky, Christina Vidal, Ryan Reynolds. Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan play a quarreling mother and daughter who accidentally switch bodies. Ooops! Mark Harmon plays the mom's fiancé. Directed by Mark Waters. Highly recommended. PG. Movies 12. Online archives.

Gothika: Halle Berry plays a criminal psychologist who blacks out and comes to

accused of murdering her husband (Charles Dutton). Now she's a patient in his hospital. Directorial debut of Mathieu Kassovitz. Also stars Penélope Cruz, Robert Downey Jr., Bernard Hill. R. Cinemark.

Haunted Mansion: Eddie Murphy stars in Rob Minkoff's (*Stuart Little*) ghost comedy, with Jennifer Tilly, Don Knotts, Terence Stamp PG. Cinemark.

Honey: Directed by Billie Woodruff. Stars Jessica Alba as a music video choreographer and Li'l Romeo, Mekhi Phifer. PG-13. Cinemark.

Last Samurai: Directed by Edward Zwick. Stars Ken Watanabe and Tom Cruise. In Japan, Civil War veteran Nathan Algren (Cruise) trains Emperor Meiji's troops in the way of the gun as they prepare to defeat the last of the country's samurais. But he is captured by the samurai (Watanabe) and learns about their traditions and code of honor. R. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Lord of the Rings: Return of the King: Peter Jackson completes the film version of Tolkien's trilogy, seven years in the making. Stars Elijah Wood, Viggo Mortensen, Sean Astin, Ian McKellen, Billy Boyd, Orlando Bloom, Liv Tyler, Cate Blanchett. Frodo (Wood) and Sam (Astin) plan to cast the One Ring into the fires of Mount Doom, but Gollum — and the Ring itself — test Frodo's allegiances and his humanity. Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) humbly accepts his kingship. Cinema World. Cinemark. See review this issue.

Love Actually: Written and directed by Richard Curtis (*Bridget Jones's Diary*),

this romantic comedy stars Hugh Grant, Liam Neeson, Colin Firth, Laura Linney, Alan Rickman, Emma Thompson, Keira Knightley, Martine McCutcheon, Bill Nighy. Great moments, fine ensemble cast. R. Cinemark.

Love Don't Cost a Thing: Directed by Troy Beyer. Stars Nick Cannon as teenager Alvin Johnson who tries to play cool by hiring a cheerleader to act as his girlfriend. Remake of 1987's *Can't Buy Me Love* starring Patrick Dempsey. PG-13. Cinemark.

Master and Commander The Far side of the World: Peter Weir brings the late Patrick O'Brian's best-selling nautical adventures to the screen with Russell Crowe as Captain Jack Aubrey and Paul Bettany as Dr. Stephen Maturin, ship surgeon and naturalist. Set during the Napoleonic Wars. Highest recommendations. PG-13. Cinemark. Online archives.

Matchstick Men: Ridley Scott directs this tale of a couple of grifters working small-time cons, until personal issues arise. Stars Nicolas Cage, Sam Rockwell, with Alison Lohman and Bruce McGill. PG-13. Movies 12. Online archives.

Mona Lisa Smile: Julia Roberts is an idealistic teacher and nonconformist at Wellesley in the 1950s. Julia Stiles, Kirsten Dunst and Maggie Gyllenhaal are her students. Mike Newell directs. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Once Upon a Time in Mexico: Directed by Robert Rodriguez. Antonio Banderas as El Mariachi, now involved in international espionage. Costars Salma Hayek, Johnny Depp and Mickey Rourke. R.

Movies 12. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Pirates of the Caribbean: Non-stop adventure directed by Gore Verbinski stars Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley. Depp sashays, Rush disassembles, Bloom fences and Knightley swashbuckles. Depp and Rush's over the top performances are great. Recommended. PG-13. Movies 12. Online archives.

Radio: High school football coach (Ed Harris) shocks a Southern town by taking on a mentally challenged youth (Cuba Gooding Jr.) and developing a decades-long friendship with him. Also stars Alfre Woddard and Debra Winger; directed by Mike Tollin. PG. Movies 12.

Runaway Jury: Gun manufacturer's explosive trial stars John Cusack, Gene Hackman, Dustin Hoffman, Rachel Weisz. Received some good reviews. PG-13. Movies 12.

School of Rock: Faking it as a substitute teacher, wild guitarist Jack Black turns elementary musical prodigies into a high-voltage rock band. Directed by Richard Linklater, it also stars Joan Cusack, Mike White and Sarah Silverman. PG-13. Movies 12.

Secondhand Lions: Haley Joe Osmont is sent to his great uncles' rural Texas farm, where the city boy has much to learn. Robert Duvall and Michael Caine may have been bank robbers. Written and directed by Tim McCanlies (writer, *The Iron Giant*). PG. Movies 12.

Something's Gotta Give: Directed by Nancy Meyers. Harry Sanborn (Jack

Nicholson) is a New York music mogul with a libido much younger than his years. Also stars Diane Keaton, Amanda Peet and Keanu Reeves. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Spy Kids 3D, Game Over: Alexa Vega and Daryl Sabara continue to embrace the family business — spying — but this time the Toymaker (Sylvester Stallone) may be their nemesis. Antonio Banderas and Carla Gugino co-star. 3-D viewing glasses required. Written and directed by Robert Rodriguez. PG. Movies 12.

Stuck on You: The Farrelly Brothers (*Something About Mary*) direct this story of conjoined twins Bob (Mat Damon) and Walt (Greg Kinnear), who move to L.A. so one can become an actor. They become a hit on a TV show starring Cher, but success threatens to drive the twins apart. Eva Mendes, Seymour Cassel and big-name cameos. Cinemark.

Texas Chainsaw Massacre: Remake of Tobe Hooper's 1974 horror classic is directed by Marcus Nispel, music video guru. Backwoods killer clan runs amok. Stars Jessica Biel, Eric Balfour and Andrew Bryniarski as Leatherface. R. Movies 12.

Tupac Resurrection: Late rap artist Tupac Shakur, who was murdered in 1996, returns to the screen in music videos and interviews. Documentary directed by Lauren Lazin for MTV Films. R. Movies 12.

Bijou Art Cinemas (686-2458)

Cinema World 8 (342-6536)

Cinemark 17 (746-5202)

Movies 12 (741-1231)