

# West Meets East

Culture dash

**THE LAST SAMURAI:** Directed by Edward Zwick. Written by John Logan, Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick. Produced by Edward Zwick, Marshall Herskovitz, Tom Cruise, Paula Wagner, Scott Kroopf, Tom Engelman. Executive producers, Ted Field, Richard Solomon, Vincent Ward, Charles Mulvehill. Cinematography, John Toll. Production design, Lilly Kilvert. Editors, Steven Rosenblum, Victor du Bois. Music by Hans Zimmer. Starring Tom Cruise, with Timothy Spall, Ken Watanabe, Billy Connolly, Tony Goldwyn, Hiroyuki Sanada and Koyuki. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2003. R. 144 minutes.

Tom Cruise hardly seems a likely hero for a late 19th century battlefield epic such as Edward Zwick's *The Last Samurai*, because we are so accustomed to seeing him in various 20th and 21st century action flicks. But Cruise made a good career choice here, because following the long buildup to the meaningful last half of the film, he gets to show a more reflective, sensitive side of his character, Nathan Algren. An embittered alcoholic veteran of the American Civil War and the brutal Indian Wars under Custer, Algren needs some time off from war's demands.

Algren is badly wounded and captured by the enemy he was hired to fight, a band of highly trained expert Samurai warriors under the leadership of the legendary Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe). Over the long months of Algren's recovery in an isolated mountain village, he is nursed to health by a lovely, quiet widow, Taka (Koyuki), and her children. Taka is Katsumoto's sister and was married to the warrior Algren killed in

combat. When Algren learns that, he begins to understand how different the way of the Japanese are from the Western military that has been his model since he was 17.

Algren looks around the village and sees people pursue excellence in whatever they do, even in small tasks, or maybe especially in small matters. From Katsumoto, Algren learns of the code of honor and respect that governs their lives. The two men achieve mutual respect after Algren saves the warrior's life when the village is invaded by a small group of masked killers.

So we're really in a Japanese Western here. The shoot-first, ask questions later code of the Old West and Bushido, the way of the warrior, work on different principles. Algren is a burnt-out case. Still troubled by nightmares of the killing of innocents and the loathsome behavior of his commanding officer, Col. Bagley (Tony Goldwyn), Algren's allegiance gradually switches to Katsumoto.

Algren and Katsumoto share in common a great love for the fight. Algren comes into his own on the battlefield, and Cruise is remarkably credible in the face of carnage. "Do you sometimes long for death?" Katsumoto asks him, and we know the answer. Algren's fearlessness in



Japanese Samurai ride in for the attack.

DAVID JAMES, WARNER BROS., 2003.

battle springs from that psychic darkness of those who believe they are unforgivable.

Other notable characters include Zebulon Gant (Billy Connolly), a cynical old warrior and friend who brings Algren the Japanese commission; the slender young emperor (S. Nakaumra), who is led astray by bad advisors and American Gatling guns and cannons; and the British photographer and translator, Simon (Timothy Spall).

*Samurai* appeals to men and women who enjoy war movies, in part because the battle scenes are realistic and cunningly filmed. In the first battle, Algren's untested Japanese conscripts are attacked by Katsumoto's seasoned warriors. Using film conventions of Japanese ghost stories and borrowing from Kurosawa, the film

allows the Samurai to slowly become visible through the mist, their elaborate headgear silhouetted against the growing light, their armor and swords clinking, their horses' hooves shaking the ground.

Likewise, the penultimate battle sequence pits the outnumbered Samurai against a well-trained Japanese army with automatic weapons. But Algren and Katsumoto outsmart the attackers, and the strategy the Greeks employed at the Battle of Thermopylae (480 B.C.) buys the Samurai warriors a little time.

*The Last Samurai* has been in area theaters for some time now. If you're going to see it at all, catch it on the big screen. It gets high marks for its depiction of men in battle as well as its lovely scenes of 19th century Japanese village life. Now playing at Cinemark. **EW**

## movie clips

**OPENING OR RETURNING:**

**Brother** (Russian New Wave, 1997): Alexi Balabanov directs film. Danila comes back from the army to join his brother on St. Petersburg's dark streets and struggles to maintain a sense of integrity. At 8:15 pm on 01/26 in 115 Pacific Hall, UO. Free.

**Butterfly Effect:** The trailer is about a young man (Ashton Kutcher) who time travels back to the past to fix the broken lives of a childhood girlfriend (Amy Smart) and his friends, Lenny (Eldoan Henson) and Tommy (William Lee Scott). R. Cinema World. Cinemark.

**Missing, The:** Ron Howard directs Cate Blanchett and Tommy Lee Jones as an estranged daughter and father in this Western set in 1885 New Mexico. Blanchett, seeking to avenge her daughter's (Evan Rachel Wood) kidnapping, reluctantly joins forces with her despised old man. R. Movies 12.

**Mystic River:** Directed by Clint Eastwood; written by Brian Koppelman, based on the novel by Dennis Lehane, this dramatic tragedy stars Sean Penn, Tim Robbins, Kevin Bacon, Laurence Fishburne, Marcia Gay Harden, Laura Linney and Emmy Rossum. Very highest recommendations. R. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

**Timeline:** Richard Donner directs screen adaptation of Michael Crichton's novel about archaeologists on a dig who time travel back 600 years to rescue their teacher, trapped in 14th century France. Stars Paul Walker, Frances O'Connor, Billy Connolly, David Thewlis. PG-13. Movies 12.

**Win a Date with Tad Hamilton:** Kate Bosworth, Topher Grace and Josh Duhamel star in this teen romance comedy directed by Robert Luketic. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World.

**Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com**

**CONTINUING:**

**Along Came Polly:** Ben Stiller plays Reuben, a hapless husband whose bride dumps him. Then he meets up with a childhood friend, Polly (Jennifer Aniston). Also stars Philip Seymour Hoffman, Hank Azaria, Bryan Brown and Alec Baldwin. John Hamburg directs. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

**Big Fish:** Tim Burton's film about a son (Billy Crudup) who tries to figure out his father's (Albert Finney) life through the wild stories he's told. Also stars Ewan McGregor, Helena Bonham Carter, Danny DeVito, Jessica Lange, Alison Lohman and Steve Buscemi. Truly wonderful film; highest recommendations. PG-13. Cinema

World. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

**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.

**Calendar Girls:** Spunky members of a woman's club in Yorkshire, England poses naked to raise money for medical research after one's husband gets leukemia. Stars Helen Mirren, Julie Walters and John Alderton. Based on a true story. Nigel Cole directs. PG-13. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

**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. With Alec Baldwin, Kelly Preston. Reviewers don't recommend. PG-13. Movies 12.

**Chasing Liberty:** In this young adult romantic comedy, Mandy Moore plays the only child of the US Prez, and Matthew Goode is the Brit she meets in Europe who helps her escape from her Secret Service agents. PG-13. Cinemark.

**Cheaper by the Dozen:** Steve Martin and Bonnie Hunt play the parents of 12 children, including Piper Perabo, Hilary Duff and Tom Welling. Directed by Shawn Levy. PG. Cinema World. Cinemark.

**Cold Mountain:** Anthony Minghella's adaptation 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. Elegaic. Excellent performances, beautiful film. Very highest recommendations. R. Cinema World. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

**Creature from the Black Lagoon:** In 3-D! The 1954 classic monster film mixes scientific discovery with legend. New print, complete with 3-D glasses tuned to bring out its best. Shows with Hentai (Japanese erotic anime). Jan. 16-18, only. Bijou.

**Elf:** Jon Favreau directs and Will Farrell stars as an elf who doesn't look like the other kids, er, elves. The big elf searches for his biological father (James Caan) in New York. PG. Movies 12.

**In America:** Jim Sheridan's memoir of living in New York in 1981 with his wife and two daughters is a heartfelt film that stars Samantha Morton, Paddy Considine, Sarah Bolger and Emma Bolger. Highest recommendations. PG-13. Bijou. **Online archives.**

**Last Samurai:** Edward Zwick directs. In Japan, US Civil War hero Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise) trains the Emperor's troops in

the way of the gun as they take on the last samurais. Algren is captured by Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe) and falls under samurai traditions and codes of honor. R. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**

**Looney Tunes:** Mixed animation/ live action directed by Joe Dante, stars Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Brendan Fraser, Jenna Elfman, Steve Martin, Timothy Dalton, Joan Cusack, Heather Locklear. PG. Movies 12.

**Lord of the Rings: Return of the King:** Peter Jackson completes Tolkien's trilogy on film, and the result is stunning. Stars Elijah Wood, Viggo Mortensen, Sean Astin, Ian McKellen, Billy Boyd, Orlando Bloom, Liv Ullmann, Cate Blanchett. In parallel stories Frodo and Sam make it to Mount Doom as the warriors of Middle Earth under the leadership of Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) fight the final battle against the forces of the evil Sauron. Very highest recommendations. Brilliant! Cinema World. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

**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. Good fun. Highly recommended. R. Movies 12. **See review this issue.**

**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.**

**Matrix Revolutions:** Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne and Carrie-Anne Moss are back for the third (and final?) Matrix episode. Written and directed by the Wachowski Brothers. Produced by Joel Silver. R. Movies 12.

**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.

**Peter Pan:** Directed by P.J. Hogan, movie stars Jason Isaacs, Jeremy Sumpter, Richard Briers, Olivia Williams, Lyn Redgrave, Ludivine Sagnier and Rachel Hurd-Wood. PG. Cinemark.

**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 Woodard and Debra Winger; directed by Mike Tollin. PG. Movies 12.

**Scary Movie 3:** Horror spoof satirizes movies such as *The Ring*, *Signs*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, *Eight Mile*. Stars Anna Farris, Charlie Sheen, Denise Richards, Eddie Griffin and Queen Latifah. Directed by David Zucker. R. 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.

**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. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

**Stuck on You:** The Farrelly Brothers (*Something About Mary*) direct this story of joined twins Bob (Mat Damon) and Walt (Greg Kinear). Walt convinces Bob to move to L.A. so he can become an actor. But success threatens to drive them apart. Also stars Cher, Eva Mendes and Seymour Cassel plus big name cameos. PG-13. Movies 12.

**Teacher's Pet:** Talking dog Spot wants to become a "real boy," and mad scientist Ivan Krank, tries to make it possible.

Nathan Lane is Spot's voice, Kesey Grammer is Krank's. PG. Cinemark.

**Torque:** Biker Cary Ford (Martin Henderson) returns to see his girlfriend, Shane (Monet Mazur), but they get caught up with some bad bikers. Also stars Adam Scott, Ice Cube, Jay Hernandez. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

**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. Bijou. **Online archives.**

**Under the Tuscan Sun:** Diane Lane plays writer Frances Mayes in this screen adaptation of her best selling book about buying a run-down villa in Italy and creating a new life. Escape from real life - beautiful people, gorgeous scenery, everybody's got money. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

**Bijou Art Cinemas (686-2458) Cinema World 8 (342-6536) Cinemark 17 (746-5202)c Movies 12 (741-1231)**

## video clips

**NEW RELEASES ON VIDEO**

Releases subject to change. Available the Tuesday following date of EW publication, sometimes sooner. See archived movie reviews at [www.eugeneweekly.com](http://www.eugeneweekly.com)

**Bang Bang You're Dead:** For Eugeneans who have seen William Mastrosimone's gritty, disturbing play produced locally, the release of the made-for-television movie on DVD is good news. Directed by Guy Ferland, the lead high school student is played by Thomas Cavanaugh. With Janel Moloney ("The West Wing"). R.

**Capturing the Friedmans:** This documentary about a Long Island family shattered by accusations that the father, a high school teacher and clown for children's parties, had molested two boys, appears on many top critic's best-of 2003 lists. Unquestionably one of the most talked-about films of the year, it took top awards at Sundance 2003. NR.

**Comic Book, The Movie (2004):** Directed by and starring Mark Hamill as a major comic book fan in Hollywood, this mockumentary treats Commander Courage comics as if they existed. Many great comic book masters appear as themselves, including Bruce Campbell, Matt Groening, Ray Harryhausen, Stan Lee, and Kevin Smith. PG-13.

**Critic, The:** Complete 23-episode television series of adult animated show on 3-disc set. Includes commentary, clips, making-of and more.

**Le Divorce:** James Ivory directs this contemporary comedy of manners based on the novel by Diane Johnson. Stars Kate Hudson and Naomi Watts as American sisters in French society, where culture clash and scandal ensue. Jean-Marc Barr, Leslie Caron, Stockard Channing and Glenn Close co-star. PG-13. **Online archives.**

**Secret Lives of Dentists:** Campbell Scott, Hope Davis and Denis Leary star in Alan Rudolph's wonderful, whimsical tale of a 10-year marriage that's getting shaky, and a houseful of little girls who reflect every tremor. One of my favorite films of 2003, it gets my very highest recommendations. R. **Online archives.**

**Smile Like Yours, A (1997):** Starring Greg Kinnear, Lauren Holly, Joan Cusack, Jay Thomas and Jill Hennessey, it's a tale of a married couple dealing with infertility. Janet Maslin of The New York Times begins her review: "Exhausting its creativity at the blueprint stage..."

**Thirteen:** Two 7th grade girls, played by Evan Rachel Wood and Nikki Reed, become entangled in a fast world where media images dominate dress, behavior, values and attitude. Holly Hunter plays the mom who tries to save them. Directed by Catherine Hardwicke. Searing, honest representation of what it's like to be a teenager today. Highly recommended. R. **Online archives.**

**Next week: Allegro Non Troppo (1976), American Splendor, Diary of Anne Frank (1959), Ed Wood (1994), Fighting Temptations, Gaslight (1944), Gods Must Be Crazy I and II, Grand Hotel, Secondhand Lions.**