

California Nightmare

Deadly real-estate antagonisms.

HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG: Written and directed by Vadim Perelman. Co-written by Shawn Lawrence Otto. Based on the book by Andre Dubus III. Produced by Michael London, Vadim Perelman. Cinematography, Roger Deakins. Production design, Maia Javan. Editor, Lisa Zeno Churgin. Costumes, Hala Bahmet. Music, James Horner. Starring Jennifer Connelly and Ben Kingsley, with Ron Eldard, Shohreh Aghdashloo and Jonathan Ahdout. DreamWorks Pictures, 2003. R. 126 minutes.

An ancient tragedy re-enacted around the ownership of a house, *House of Sand and Fog* chronicles how in an age when homelessness has become a widespread social problem, two families find themselves locked in a power struggle.

A depressed young woman falls apart emotionally when she loses her home. Kathy (Jennifer Connelly) has been unable to act since her marriage fell apart. She establishes a relationship with an attentive sheriff's officer, Lester (Ron Eldard), who helps move her things to a motel when she is evicted from the house her recently deceased father left her.

An Iranian immigrant family's hardworking father, Massoud Amir Behrani (Ben Kingsley), strives to re-create some of the glory of his family's affluent past for his Old World wife, Nadi (Shohreh Aghdashloo), and Americanized skateboarder son, Esmail (Jonathan Ahdout). He buys the house on the cheap and moves his family into it immedi-

ately. He plans to sell the house right away for four times what he paid.

That the house is a modest bungalow not a pretentious home is of no consequence. The house is a literary metaphor ineptly adapted to the concrete reality of film. This notion may help you better understand the story's central conflict, which is a tragic misunderstanding. Agonizing over the house's influence cripples the characters, muddies their behavior and leads inexorably to the story's foreshadowed outcome.

Ah yes, the final tragedy. Suffice it to say a gun is responsible. In the context of the emotionally harrowing experiences of the characters, the gun is a false lead, a literary device, a cliché so overused as to be almost invisible to contemporary audiences. But the introduction of the gun here points to a failure of the creative imagination in an otherwise character-driven drama.

In *House*, the gun yanks the story, roots and all, out of the grounding force of the flawed characters by introducing the chance factor, the easy way out, which requires little logic and even less invention. The gun, complete with its Wild West and gangster connotations, serves the story badly and sends the film off the rails. A cinematic short-cut, the gun's presence tells your sinking heart that nothing good will come. Disbelief and distance muffle the tragedy and make it feel unreal.



No love's lost between former owner Kathy (Jennifer Connelly) and current owner Col. Behrani (Ben Kingsley).

BRUCE BERMELIN, DREAMWORKS, 2003.

Mystic River suffers from a similar gun problem. But the conflicts addressed in that book and film are of longer duration than a few days, and the setting is both more urban and less law-abiding. Ignore these caveats, and imagine what could happen if no movie character ever had the option of killing herself or others with a weapon. Now, that would be a real revolution.

I haven't read Andre Dubus III's book, but Peter Keough (*Boston Phoenix*) has, and he calls this adaptation "just plain awful." I cannot tell you if the novel offers the reader consolations that make up for the plot device of the gun. But I can tell you that the gun's inclusion destroys the film's credibility and even devalues the principal performances by Connelly, Kingsley and Aghdashloo.

Kingsley's Col. Behrani shows his anar-

chical military stripes when he forcibly steers Kathy out of his house. Kingsley drew on the brutality of the unforgettable mobster, Don Logan, he played in *Sexy Beast* (2000). Connelly's performance as Kathy was more subdued than I expected, based on her compelling portrait of an upper-class drug addict on the path to degradation in *Requiem for a Dream* (2001). But as Kathy wakes from her stupor, Connelly movingly reveals her tentative steps to reach out. Iranian star Aghdashloo is largely unknown in this country, and her character is a traditional, unassuming woman. But the actress shines with confidence and intelligence. We deserve to see more of her work.

House of Sand and Fog is now playing at Movies 12. Despite its flaws, the film is worth seeing.

EW

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING: **Against the Ropes:** Fictionalized drama inspired by successful female boxing manager. Directed by Charles S. Dutton, movie stars Meg Ryan and Omar Epps. PG-13. 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 Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Finding Nemo: Pixar's computer-animated fantasy of two Clownfish, Marlin and his son Nemo, who get separated in the Great Barrier Reef. Written and directed by Andrew Stanton (*A Bug's Life*), with voices by Albert Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres, Willem Dafoe, Geoffrey Rush, Allison Janney. Very highly recommended. 2003 Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film. G. At 7 pm on 3/31 in 100 Willamette Hall, UO campus. Free. **Online archives.**

Jersey Girl: Written and directed by Kevin Smith, film's about a music publicist (Ben Affleck) trying to balance work and fatherhood as a single parent. Also stars Jennifer Lopes, George Carlin, Liv Tyler, Jason Biggs. Raquel Castro is his independent daughter. PG-13. Cinemark.

Ladykillers, The: Based on the 1955 British comedy starring Peter Sellers and Alec Guinness, Ethan and Joel Coen's adaptation stars Tom Hanks and Marlon Wayons. When these bank robbers move into "no hip-hop" house of a Southern church-going woman, anything goes. R. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Never Die Alone: Ernest Dickerson's new film stars DMX as King David, a criminal seeking redemption who finds death, and David Arquette as the journalist who learns his whole story. Also stars Michael Ealy, Reagan Preston-Gomez. R. Cinemark.

Nirvana: Concert 1994: LateNite Bijou.

Prince and Me, The: Stars Julia Stiles, Luke Mably. She's a pre-med student. He's the Crown Prince of Denmark. Also stars James Fox and Miranda Richardson. PG. Sneak at 7 pm on 3/27 and 2 pm on 3/28. Cinemark.

Scooby Doo 2 Monsters Unleashed: Some scary action, rude humor and language. PG. Cinemark. Cinema World. **Sideways** (1990): The Pushkin Club

revives interest in removing Russia from "the scum of Western influence" Presenter calls Yuri Mamim's film "a biting warning of fascism and militarism." At 8:45 pm on 3/30 in 115 Pacific Hall, UO campus. Free. In Russian with English subtitles.

2001: A Space Odyssey: Stanley Kubrick's classic futuristic film from 1968 follows astronauts on a space voyage to Jupiter that's been taken over by a computer, HAL 9000, which they must stop. Beautiful special effects and Kubrick's choice of music add to film's mystical appeal. Not rated. LateNite Bijou.

Walking Tall: Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson returns home after military career to find his hometown overrun with crime, drugs and violence. He's elected sheriff to shut down his former rival's criminal biz. Directed by Kevin Bray. PG-13. Sneak at 7:30 pm on 3/27. Cinemark.

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. Movies 12..

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

CONTINUING:

Agent Cody Banks 2 Destination London: Frankie Muniz returns as spy Cody Banks, this time he's undercover in London as a student at an elite boarding school. PG. Cinemark.

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. Movies 12.

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 (Eldoen Henson) and Tommy (William Lee Scott). R. Movies 12.

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. Movies 12.

Company, The: Robert Altman's dream

of a dance movie stars the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago. Neve Campbell, Malcolm MacDowell. One of Altman's most relaxed yet highly observant films. He "gets" dance, and *The Company* shows it. Highly recommended. PG-13. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Dawn of the Dead: Remake of George Romero's 1978 cult classic about a shopping mall taken over by those trying to survive a zombie plague. Unlikely stars: the excellent Sarah Polley (*My Life Without Me*) and Ving Rhames. R. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: Highly acclaimed film directed by Michel Gondry from screenplay by Charlie Kaufman (*Adaptation*). Stars Jim Carrey, Kate Winslet, Tom Wilkinson, with Mark Ruffalo, Elijah Wood, Kirsten Dunst. Carrey discovers Winslet had memories of their relationship erased. Now he wants to do the same. Or does he? Very highest recommendations. R. Cinema World. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**

Fifty First Dates: Drew Barrymore and Adam Sandler in a romance with a catch: she has no short-term memory recall, so she forgets him every night. Also stars Rob Schneider, Sean Astin and Dan Aykroyd. Directed by Peter Segal. PG-13. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

Haunted Mansion: Eddie Murphy stars in Rob Minkoff's (*Stuart Little*) ghost comedy, with Jennifer Tilly, Don Knotts, Terence Stamp PG. Movies 12.

Hidalgo: Based on autobiography of distance rider Frank T. Hopkins, played by Viggo Mortensen, this epic action-adventure takes place during a 3,000 mile survival race across the Arabian Desert in 1890. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

House of Sand and Fog: Vadim Perelman's adaptation of Andre Dubus III's novel loses something essential in the process. Jennifer Connelly stars. 2004 Academy Award contender for actor, Ben Kingsley; supporting actress, Iranian star Shohreh Aghdashloo; original score, James Horner. Despite its flaws, the film is worth seeing. R. Movies 12. **See review this issue.**

Last Samurai, The: Edward Zwick directs this action-adventure starring Tom Cruise as a bitter Civil War vet in China to train emperor's troops to defeat samurais. Captured by warrior Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe), he learns Samurai traditions and code of

honor.2003 Academy Award noms: Watanabe, Supporting Actor; art direction; sound mixing; costume design. R. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Lord of the Rings: Return of the King: Peter Jackson's stunning work stars Elijah Wood, Viggo Mortensen, Sean Astin, Ian McKellen, Billy Boyd, Orlando Bloom, Liv Tyler, Cate Blanchett. Frodo and Sam make it to Mount Doom as Aragorn leads the warriors of Middle Earth in the final battle against Sauron. 2003 Academy Award sweeps for Best Picture; Director, Peter Jackson; adapted screenplay; art direction; sound mixing; original score; original song; costume design; film editing; makeup; and visual effects. Very highest recommendations. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

Master and Commander The Far side of the World: Peter Weir brings Patrick O'Brian's best-selling nautical adventures during the Napoleonic era to the screen, with Russell Crowe as Captain Jack Aubrey and Paul Bettany as Dr. Stephen Maturin, ship surgeon and naturalist. Very highest recommendations. Academy Awards for cinematography, sound editing; nominated for picture; director; art direction; sound mixing; costume design; film editing; makeup; visual effects. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Passion of Christ, The (2004): Mel Gibson film opens amid charges (denied) of anti-Semitism. A.O. Scott of *The New York Times* writes, "'The Passion of the Christ' is so relentlessly focused on the savagery of Jesus' final hours that this film seems to arise less from love than from wrath, and to succeed more in assaulting the spirit than in uplifting it." Others call the graphic torture unwatchable. R. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Perfect Score, The: Cast includes Erika Christensen and Scarlett Johansson in tale of six high-school students who band together to heist the SAT. PG-13. Movies 12.

Peter Pan: Directed by P.J. Hogan, movie stars Jason Isaacs, Jeremy Sumpter, Richard Briers, Olivia Williams, Lyn Redgrave, Ludvine Sagnier and Rachel Hurd-Wood. PG. Movies 12.

Secret Window: Psychotic (John Turturro) stalks writer (Johnny Depp), accusing him of stealing the ending to his story. David Koepp directs, story by Stephen King. Also stars Maria Bello, Timothy Hutton, Charles S. Dutton. PG-13. Cinemark.

Something's Gotta Give: Directed by Nancy Meyers. Harry Sanborn (Jack Nicholson) is a New York music mogul with a young libido, while Diane Keaton is a writer with more on her mind than

sex. With Amanda Peet, Frances McDormand and Keanu Reeves. 2003 Academy Award nomination for Keaton. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Starsky and Hutch: Ben Stiller is uptight Starsky, while Owen Wilson is laid back Ken "Hutch" Hutchinson in this remake of TV's undercover crime-fighters. With Vince Vaughn, Snoop Dogg, Juliette Lewis. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World.

Taking Lives: All-star cast includes Angelina Jolie, Ethan Hawke, Keifer Sutherland, Olivier Martinez and Jean-Hughes Anglade. Directed by D.J. Caruso, this thriller is about a serial killer who steals his victims' identities. R. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Touching the Void: In 1985, two daring British climbers scaled the unclimbed west face of 20, 853 foot Siula Grande in the Peruvian Andes. Coming down, a succession of events made their survival unlikely. Director Kevin Macdonald's brilliant and touching mixed documentary and re-enactment adventure film gets highest recommendations. NR. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Bijou Art Cinemas (686-2458)
Cinema World 8 (342-6536)
Cinemark 17 (746-5202)
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

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.

House of Sand and Fog: R. Now playing at Movies 12. **See review this issue.**

Music collections of Louis Jordan, Nat King Cole, Sarah Vaughn: Early video and films of these talented and popular musical stars.

Ripley's Game (2002): Never had a theatrical showing in Eugene, Liliana Cavani's film adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's novel stars John Malkovich as murderer Tom Ripley, with Ray Winstone and Douggray Scott. Was previously filmed as *An American Friend*, with Dennis Hopper in the made-for-Malkovich role. R.

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

Next week: Cheaper by the Dozen, The Grapes of Wrath (1940), Hope Springs, Kristen Lavransdatter, The Matrix Revolutions, Meet Me in St. Louis, My Family, Passionada, Room with a View, Sherman's March (1986).