

By the power of Grayskull, I. AM. BEOWULF.

Yes, We Know You're Beowulf

Sixth century Danes meet today's technology

BEOWULF: Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Screenplay by Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary. Cinematography, Robert Presley. Music, Alan Silvestri. Starring Ray Winstone, Anthony Hopkins, John Malkovich, Robin Wright Penn, Crispin Glover and Angelina Jolie. Paramount Pictures, 2007. PG-13. 113 min. ★★☆☆☆

of (he also does a good bit of looking remarkably like Sean Bean). He squints bravely at King Hrothgar (Anthony Hopkins), whose people he rescues from the

deformed Grendel (Crispin Glover, animated to look like an escapee from *Resident Evil*); lustily at Wealthow (Robin Wright Penn), Hrothgar's beautiful queen; and more lustily still at Grendel's mother (Angelina Jolie), whose promises of power and renown are too much for a mere man to resist.

In his popular online journal, co-screenwriter Neil Gaiman wrote that *Beowulf* "explores the relationship between a person and a story about a person." It's a lovely notion, and one worthy of Gaiman's better work, but in this straightforward (if occasionally slightly subversive) film, it's hardly

apparent. *Beowulf* is an action-adventure spectacular of the highest degree, full of raging demons, fire-billowing dragons and nasty deaths; character development is secondary (if not tertiary). It's best seen through the thankless character of Wealthow, who grows wiser and steelier as her kings repeat their predecessors' mistakes. Through her eyes, we see how these powerful men are doomed to fight demons of their own creation — and to lose everything when they appear to win. But we have to look awfully hard to see even that. **EW**

Beowulf is now playing at Cinemark and VRC Stadium 15.

There's something amusingly communal about going to a 3-D movie: The screen instructs you to put on your funny plastic glasses and everyone, giggling, complies, only to begin oohing and aahing as animated rain appears to drip just past their noses. With *Beowulf*, the 3-D fun peaks at about the point when a swordpoint is waved awfully close to Beowulf's (Ray Winstone) face. Later, though the film's level of spectacle continues to climb, the 3-D seems to fall a little behind, like just another tool in the toybox of the filmmakers.

The good news: *Beowulf* doesn't resemble a videogame as much as the previews suggested. But director Robert Zemeckis and his sizable team of animators still haven't managed to make "performance capture" animation truly compelling. The technique allows the film to include scenes that might otherwise be unfilmable, but it also leaves background characters with jerky movements and main characters with oddly unfocused eyes. Unless, that is, the character in question is squinting, and squinting is something our sculpted hero does quite a bit

Sex, Tedium

LUST, CAUTION: Directed by Ang Lee. Written by Wang Hui Ling and James Schamus, based on the short story "Se, jei" by Eileen Chang. Cinematography, Rodrigo Prieto. Music, Alexandre Desplat. Starring Tony Leung, Tang Wei, Joan Chen and Wang Leehom. Focus Features, 2007. NC-17. 157 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

If little else about it compels you, you might at least find Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* quite lovely to look at. As shot by Rodrigo Prieto (the director of photography on Alejandro González Iñárritu's films), WWII-era Hong Kong and Shanghai are elegant, drab places where light often seems to come from within people, their faces bright spots in dim parlors and streets. The brightest spot in these streets is the gorgeous face of Wong Chia Chi (Tang Wei), a student and actress who turns revolutionary when she's recruited by a small group of fellow students working to overthrow the Japanese occupation. Tang's composed bearing and acting skills suit her well in the task she's given: earning the trust (and lust) of Mr. Yee (Tony Leung), a collaborator with the Japanese. Between snappy mah-jongg games with Mrs. Yee (Joan Chen) and friends, Wong does just that.

Lee's film dances lightly with issues of identity, love and power, but it remains flat and stuffy, despite both Lee's attention to gorgeous detail (the dresses! the teacups!) and the intense, realistic sex scenes that earned the film an NC-17 rating. What ought to carry the film is the relationship between Wong and Mr. Yee, set against the realities of this period in Chinese history. But there is too little character on which to base Wong and Yee's connection, and the story seems to sit atop its historical setting rather than fully engaging with it. There is a potentially fascinating story hiding behind the fastidious beauty of Lee's vision, but this languid, unconvincing historical romance doesn't succeed in bringing it to the fore. — Molly Templeton

Lust, Caution opens Friday, Nov. 23, at the Bijou.

Tang Wei and Tony Leung in *Lust, Caution*



movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

August Rush: Keri Russell and Jonathan Rhys Meyers star as a musical young couple whose love-lorn encounter produces a child. Orphaned "by circumstance" (says the description), the boy (Freddie Highmore) grows up to become a musical prodigy. PG. 113 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Dragon Wars: The good: Dragons! In L.A.! The bad: The plot is a convoluted thing about magical powers, resurrected lovers and a dragon that will be able to ascend into heaven. Also, the biggest names in the cast are Jason Behr (*Roswell*) and Robert Forster. But still ... dragons! In L.A.! Can it be better than *Reign of Fire*? PG13. 90 min. Movies 12.

Enchanted: Beautiful princesses! Handsome princes! And ... midtown Manhattan? Amy Adams (*Junebug*), James Marsters (*X-Men*) and Patrick Dempsey (*Grey's Anatomy*) star in this fairy tale in the real world, which follows Princess Giselle (Adams) after a wicked witch banishes her from her magical kingdom. Why does this Disney flick look so charming? PG. 107 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Good Luck Chuck: Chuck (Dane Cook) has a hex on him: every girl he dates finds true love with the next guy she dates. Enter Cam (Jessica Alba), a klutzy sweetheart Chuck falls for hard. Clearly, he's got to wiggle out from under his strange curse. R. 101 min. Movies 12.

Heartbreak Kid, The: Wasn't this movie called *Meet the Parents* a few years ago? OK, OK, so this time it's the girl who's the problem. And this adaptation of Neil Simon's 1972 play is directed by the Farrelly Brothers, who struck gold with *Stiller* and humiliation comedy with *There's Something About Mary*. R. 115 min. Movies 12.

Hitman: Timothy Olyphant, go back to *Deadwood*! No, kidding, kidding. But honestly, I'm not sure this videogame-based film about a professional assassin trying to find out who set him up (wait, does this remind anyone of Jason Bourne?) is the best place for you. R. 100 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Labyrinth: Don't make me start singing the song. You know which one I mean. And don't miss a screening of this shiny new print of Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*, one of the most wonderful movies of the 1980s. Jennifer Connelly! David Bowie in tights! Goblins, fairies and talking worms, oh my! PG. 122 min. Bijou LateNite, with a Thanksgiving matinee.

Lust, Caution: Ang Lee follows *Brokeback Mountain* with this slow, meticulous story about a young woman (Tang Wei) who poses as someone else in order to win the trust (and lust) of a man (Tony Leung) working with the Japanese during the occupation of Shanghai. Elegant but distant. NC17. 158 min. Bijou. See review this issue.

Mist, The: I keep wondering what's next. *The Cloud? The Hailstorm?* Stephen King can make monsters out of anything, right? Frank Darabont directs this adaptation of a King short story about a creepy mist that hides even creepier creatures. R. 124 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

No Country for Old Men: The latest from the Coen brothers

is an adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's acclaimed novel, and it's earning plenty of acclaim itself. The story involves a small-town sheriff, a deadly drug deal and a psychopathic killer (Javier Bardem). The reviewers say "intense," "searing," "an evil delight." R. 122 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

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

CONTINUING:

Across the Universe: Julie Taymor (*Titus*, Broadway's *The Lion King*) puts her ambitious but unsatisfying spin on a love story built around Beatles songs, following a young man (Jim Sturgess) and the girl he falls for (Evan Rachel Wood) amid the tumult of the 1960s. PG13. 131 min. VRC Stadium 15.

★★★☆☆ (10/18)

American Gangster: Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe face off in the story of 1970s cop turned drug lord Frank Lucas (Washington) and the cop investigating Lucas and his unexpected rise to power. Directed by Ridley Scott. R. 157 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (11/8)

Bee Movie: Not much looks all that sweet about this animated comedy, in which Jerry Seinfeld voices a recent bee college graduate who learns, to his shock, that humans have been stealing bees' honey for ages and ages. With the voices of Renee Zellweger and Matthew Broderick. PG. 90 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Bella: A bad day for two people — one a former soccer player, the other a pregnant waitress — results in an unexpected connection. "A heart-tugger with the confidence not to tug too hard," said Roger Ebert. PG13. 100 min. Cinemark.

Beowulf: Robert Zemeckis, working from a screenplay by Roger Avary and Neil Gaiman, directs this version of the story of the warrior Beowulf, with Ray Winstone in the title role and Angelina Jolie as Grendel's mother. Reviews are good, but it still looks like a video game. PG13. 114 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. See review this issue.

Bourne Ultimatum, The: "I remember everything," says Matt Damon's Jason Bourne in this film's action-packed trailer. Director Paul Greengrass and the major players (Joan Allen, Julia Stiles) return to the series' satisfying third installment, which finds Bourne hunting down his past in stunning locations. PG13. 111 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (8/9)

Dan in Real Life: Poor Dan (Steve Carrell) is an advice columnist with a passel of daughters whose life is further complicated when he falls for his brother's girlfriend (Juliette Binoche). Also, the brother is played by Dane Cook. PG13. 99 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Darjeeling Limited, The: Wes Anderson returns with this story about three brothers (Owen Wilson, Jason Schwartzman and Adrien Brody) on a journey through India. They're sort of going to find their mom; they're sort of going to find something spiritual; they're sort of going to reconnect. But alas, the train sort of goes nowhere — not that

that'll keep Anderson fans from jumping on for the ride. R. 91 min. Bijou. ★★☆☆☆ (10/25)

Fred Claus: So what if Santa had a brother? Who happened to be the opposite of the saintly gift-giver: a repo man? That's the basic premise of this film, but the reason people will see it, I suspect, is for Paul Giamatti in a Santa suit getting in a fight with Vince Vaughn. PG. 116 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Halloween: Rob Zombie directs this remake of John Carpenter's 1978 film, but opts to take a peek into the past that created Michael Myers. R. 109 min. Movies 12.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix: The Ministry of Magic is in denial about the return of Lord Voldemort, Hogwarts get a nasty new teacher and Harry ... Harry's in one kind of trouble or another throughout the mostly successful and only slightly disappointing fifth HP film. It's not quite *Prisoner of Azkaban*, but it's getting there. PG13. 138 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (7/19)

Into the Wild: Star Emile Hirsch bears a reasonable resemblance to Christopher McCandless, a bright, privileged young man who took off into Alaska in the early 1990s, but Sean Penn's adaptation of Jon Krakauer's novel doesn't create an entirely satisfying portrait of the man whose story has been captivating readers for a decade. R. 140 min. Bijou. ★★☆☆☆ (10/18)

Jane Austen Book Club, The: A sweet but slightly off adaptation of Karen Joy Fowler's bestselling novel about six people — three friends, a daughter, two strangers — who form a book group to discuss Jane Austen's six novels. Austen's themes resonate throughout the story, and the cast is winning, but the film never reaches above a certain level of charm. PG13. 106 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (10/4)

Lars and the Real Girl: The remarkable Ryan Gosling (*Half Nelson*) stars as Lars, who meets and brings home Bianca, a life-sized doll he treats as if she were a person. The film's "daring and delicate blend of apparent irreconcilables will sweep you off your feet if you're not careful," said *Los Angeles Times*. PG13. 106 min. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (11/1)

Lions for Lambs: Heavyweight actors take heavyweight roles in this story of three relatively powerful people — a professor (Robert Redford, who also directs), a senator (Tom Cruise) and a journalist (Meryl Streep) — whose actions and choices will affect the lives of two young men fighting in Afghanistan. R. 90 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (11/15)

Love in the Time of Cholera: Mike Newell (*Donnie Brasco*, *Pushing Tin*) directs this adaptation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' novel about a man who waits more than 50 years for his true love, engaging in many affairs while he waits for her to be free. Starring Javier Bardem and Giovanna Mezzogiorno. R. 139 min. Cinemark. See review this issue.

Martian Child, The: John Cusack continues to drag his formerly youthful cinematic persona into adulthood with this

film about a man who adopts a boy who claims to be from Mars. With Amanda Peet and the always-wonderful Joan Cusack. PG. 108 min. Movies 12.

Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium: This story about a magical toy store, its owner (Dustin Hoffman) and the young shop employee who might inherit it (Natalie Portman) is written and directed by Zach Helm, who also wrote last year's *Stranger Than Fiction*. G. 94 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Punk's Not Dead: As punk nears its 30th anniversary, this documentary explores the places where punk still thrives, from recording studios to basements and malls, considering whether a true punk spirit can still exist after punk's been made into a marketing concept. Not rated. 93 min. Bijou LateNite.

Ratatouille: The latest animated film from Pixar is directed by Brad Bird (whose *The Iron Giant* is too often overlooked) and concerns a big-dreaming rat who wants to be a chef. When he makes a deal with a garbage boy, the culinary world of Paris gets far more than it ever imagined. G. 110 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (7/12)

Stardust: Matthew Vaughn (*Layer Cake*) takes a firm and steady hand to the many plot threads of this adaptation of Neil Gaiman's novel about a fallen star with an attitude and the many characters seeking her. Wicked and charming, sweet and sly, with a stellar cast and a superb sense of humor. PG13. 128 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (8/9)

Superbad: Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen both have fingers in this pie, as co-producer and co-writer, respectively. It's the story of two high school friends, Evan (Michael Cera, *Arrested Development*) and Seth (Jonah Hill), who are trying — well, in classic teen movie fashion, they're trying really hard to get laid. They're about to go off to college; what do you expect? R. 114 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (8/23)

3:10 to Yuma: Russell Crowe and Christian Bale costar in this solid Western from director James Mangold (*Walk the Line*). Based on a short story by Elmore Leonard that was made into a film in 1957, the film follows a vicious outlaw (Crowe) and the Civil War vet (Bale) who's volunteered to get the thief to the train that'll take him to trial. R. 117 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (9/13)

Underdog: Jason Lee voices the titular canine, who finds himself superpowered after an incident in the lab of mad scientist Simon Barsinister (Peter Dinklage). Bad guys have plots, but Underdog has a spaniel to impress! Oh, and the day to save. PG. 84 min. Movies 12.

War Made Easy: This documentary, based on the book by Norman Solomon, takes on government deception and the media's complicity in the nation's wars but fails to effectively make many of its points; the film seems to presuppose that you're already on its side and don't need too much evidence in order to be even more thoroughly convinced. But it's hard to fault Solomon and the filmmakers too heavily, as their hearts — and minds — are in the right place. Not rated. 73 min. Bijou.