



Cut to the Chase

Not enough bloody fun

SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET: Directed by Tim Burton. Screenplay by John Logan, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, based on the musical by Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler from an adaptation by Christopher Bond. Production design, Dante Ferretti. Cinematography, Dariusz Wolski. Starring Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, Alan Rickman, Timothy Spall and Sacha Baron Cohen. Dreamworks, 2007. R. 117 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

There’s certainly plenty to love about a musical about murder and cannibalism. After all, so many musicals

are just so damn *happy*; there’s always something wonderful going on, like a parade or a romance or something. *Sweeney Todd* isn’t the only musical to take on a dark theme, but there’s nonetheless something downright delicious about the relish *Todd*, at least in the hands of Tim Burton, shows for spurting blood, cockroaches, dirty streets and underhanded dealings. The film’s credits, set to an orchestral version of “The Ballad of Sweeney Todd,” have a wonderfully ominous, suggestive tone, but the film, alas, can’t seem to keep it up.

The endless spurting blood, the occasional giddily dark montage: These are the film’s winning bits.

Todd is a pretty straightforward revenge tale, which Johnny Depp’s title character, a barber, spells out for his listeners early on: A corrupt, lustful judge set up Todd — then called Benjamin Barker — in order to swoop in on his beautiful wife and child. After years spent in a penal colony, Parker-turned-Todd has returned to London, ready to even the score. For friends, he’s got a naïve seaman named Anthony (Jamie Campbell Bower) and the indescribably bad cook Mrs. Lovett (Helena Bonham Carter), whose ability to make the best of a bad situation comes in wildly handy when Todd takes out the first man to remember who the gloomy barber used to be.

Todd is a man obsessed, so it’s not a surprise that his character is rather one-note: Revenge! Murder! Razors! Depp, though, has a touch too much of old Edward Scissorhands about his bearing, particularly as he glowers his way through Mrs. Lovett’s “By the Sea,” in which she, mooning over Todd, envisions a happy life in the future (and what lovely visions Burton and his designers give her). Depp’s rumble of a singing voice suits his character, as Bonham Carter’s reedy, inconsistent tones suit Mrs. Lovett (though her voice sometimes gets lost in the mix during the busy “The Worst Pies in London”).

Alan Rickman, playing the loathsome Judge Turpin, steals his every scene, conveying (as he always does) a world of scorn with the twitch of an eyebrow. And Timothy Spall clearly delights in chewing on his lines as the corrupt Beadle Bamford. But *Sweeney Todd* neither gives us enough reason to care about these characters nor enough grisly glee to simply enjoy the macabre story for what it is — at least, not very often. Todd and Mrs. Lovett’s fantastically misanthropic little ditty about how London might become literally a man eat man world, which neatly encompasses some of the film’s themes, is a clever joy, but it doesn’t come until about halfway through the film (prior to that, Sacha Baron Cohen has a juicy, tiny part as a rival barber), which takes its time building atmosphere, if little else.

The endless spurting blood, the occasional giddily dark montage: These are the film’s winning bits. They just don’t carry it through the half-hearted snippets of melody, the thin characterizations or the endless gloom — which, dark as it is, seems all surface darkness, glossy and grim but without a heart hiding somewhere, pumping the shiny, paintlike blood. Consistently dark but inconsistent about the source of that darkness, *Sweeney Todd* is a marvel of gloriously bleak sets, stunning costumes and effective lighting, but it can only offer so many squirming groans and laughs, so many moments at which you know it’s not all going to end well, before it slinks to its maudlin, bloody close. **EW**

movie clips

Opening or returning:

Game Plan, The: The Rock stretches his dramatic skills as a football player faced with a strange challenge: a little girl who claims to be his daughter. PG. Movies 12.

Margot at the Wedding: The latest film from Noah Baumbach (*The Squid and the Whale*, the underrated *Kicking and Screaming* that’s not the Will Ferrell movie of the same name) concerns the strained relationship between two sisters (Jennifer Jason Leigh and Nicole Kidman) and how it plays out as one’s wedding looms. “This lacerating film ... pushes family drama right to the edge,” says *The Los Angeles Times*. R. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Saw IV: Jigsaw (Tobin Bell) and his apprentice are dead, but the nastiness continues during the investigation of his last bunch of murders. But if you’re going to see this one, you don’t need me to tell you that. R. 108 min. Movies 12.

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. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (10/18)

Alien vs. Predator: Requiem:

Honest to goodness, I didn’t even know they were making another AVP until I saw an ad last week. Directors Colin and Greg Strause did visual effects work on *300*, which ought to be enough to get a certain audience into theaters to watch the nasty monsters fight. R. 86 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Alvin and the Chipmunks: What’s next? A live-action Care Bears movie starring Jason Lee? (He’s in this and *Underdog*, for those not keeping track.) Those wacky little creatures with the high-pitched voices will surely cause him some trouble in this newest bit of family fare. With, um, David Cross. Now I’m confused. PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

American Gangster: Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe face off in the story of 1970s driver turned drug lord Frank Lucas (Washington) and the cop investigating Lucas and his unexpected rise to power. Directed by Ridley Scott. R. 157 min. Movies 12. ★★☆☆☆ (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. Movies 12.

Charlie Wilson’s War: Mike Nichols directs from an Aaron Sorkin script this political ... drama? comedy? ... about a congressman (Tom Hanks) who combined forces with a CIA agent (Philip Seymour Hoffman) and a rich socialite (Julia Roberts) to direct a massive covert operation during the Cold War era. R. 97 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium

15.

Eagle vs. Shark: “*Napoleon Dynamite* in New Zealand” is both too glib a description and not that far off for this overly quirky film about two peculiar characters who sort of fall in love — when one’s not “training” to defeat his high school nemesis in single combat. Still, it’s not without its charms. R. 87 min. Bijou LateNite. ★★☆☆☆

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. VRC Stadium 15.

Golden Compass, The: An only slightly above average film — mostly on account of the fantastic casting — based on Philip Pullman’s utterly brilliant novel. In a world much like our own, everyone has an animal companion who’s part of themselves, and one little girl (newcomer Dakota Blue Richards) is the key to saving not just her own world, but countless others as well. With Daniel Craig, Nicole Kidman, Sam Elliott and Eva Green. PG13. 113 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (12/13)

Great Debaters, The: Denzel Washington (who also directs) stars in the (based-on-a-true) story of a debate coach in the segregated South who leads his Texas college team to a face-off with Harvard. PG13. 123 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

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. Movies 12.

I Am Legend: Will Smith does the all-by-his-lonesome thing in a New York City left not exactly empty after a manmade virus devastates the globe. During the day, he tries to find other survivors; at night, he tries to survive the creatures that are what’s left of humanity. PG13. 100 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. ★★☆☆☆ (12/20)

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. Movies 12.

National Treasure: Book of Secrets: Nicolas Cage returns for more adventure and hijinks — something to do with the president’s secret book (hey, this sounds like *Crooked Little Vein*!) and clearing his family’s name; did great-great grandpa have something to do with Lincoln’s assassination? With Helen Mirren. PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

No Country for Old Men: The latest from the Coen brothers is a near-masterpiece, 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. VRC Stadium 15.

★★★☆☆ (11/29)

P.S. I Love You: Holly (Hilary Swank) must go on without the love of her life, Gerry (Gerard Butler) when illness strikes. But for her 30th birthday, she gets a letter and a tape from Gerry, telling her how to make the most of her life. Sorry, have to end this there; I feel a bit queasy from all the sweetness. PG13. 126 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Resident Evil: Extinction: Alice (Milla Jovovich) is *still* trying to get rid of that pesky zombie-making virus. For this third film in the series, Alice gets new friends (we suspect they replace those zombieified last time out) including *Heroes*’ Ali Larter and singer Ashanti. R. 95 min. Movies 12.

Romance and Cigarettes: John Turturro’s film finally breaks free from distribution limbo. The peculiar comedy-drama-musical mix gets messy at times, but a great cast (Susan Sarandon, Kate Winslet, James Gandolfini, Mary-Louise Parker), hysterical musical sequences and snappy dialogue make this bawdy working-class romance/heartbreak film a winner. R. 105 min. Bijou. ★★☆☆☆ (12/20)

Sweeney Todd: Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter (and Alan Rickman!) star in Tim Burton’s take on the Broadway musical about a murderous barber who’s sworn revenge for what happened to his wife and daughter. “Depp is simply stupendous,” says *Rolling Stone*. R. 117 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15. **See revie this issue.**

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.

Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story: While I’m all for both John C. Reilly and the sending up of *Walk the Line*, this satirical rock ‘n’ roll faux-biopic appears, from the trailers, to be trying too hard. But it’s directed by Jake Kasdan, whose *The Zero Effect* was shamefully overlooked. Hrm. R. 96 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Water Horse: Legend of the Deep: It’s nice to see Ben Chaplin (*The Truth About Cats and Dogs*) again, even if it’s in this too-cute-but-still-charming children’s film about a boy who finds a mysterious eggs that turns into a mythical creature. Directed by Jay Russell (*My Dog Skip*). PG. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

We Own the Night: Family and loyalty clash in James Gray’s film, in which nightclub manager Bobby (Joaquin Phoenix) hides his relationship to a NYC cop family while also keeping a distance from the gangster who operates out of his club. With Mark Wahlberg, Eva Mendes and Robert Duvall. R. 105 min. Movies 12.