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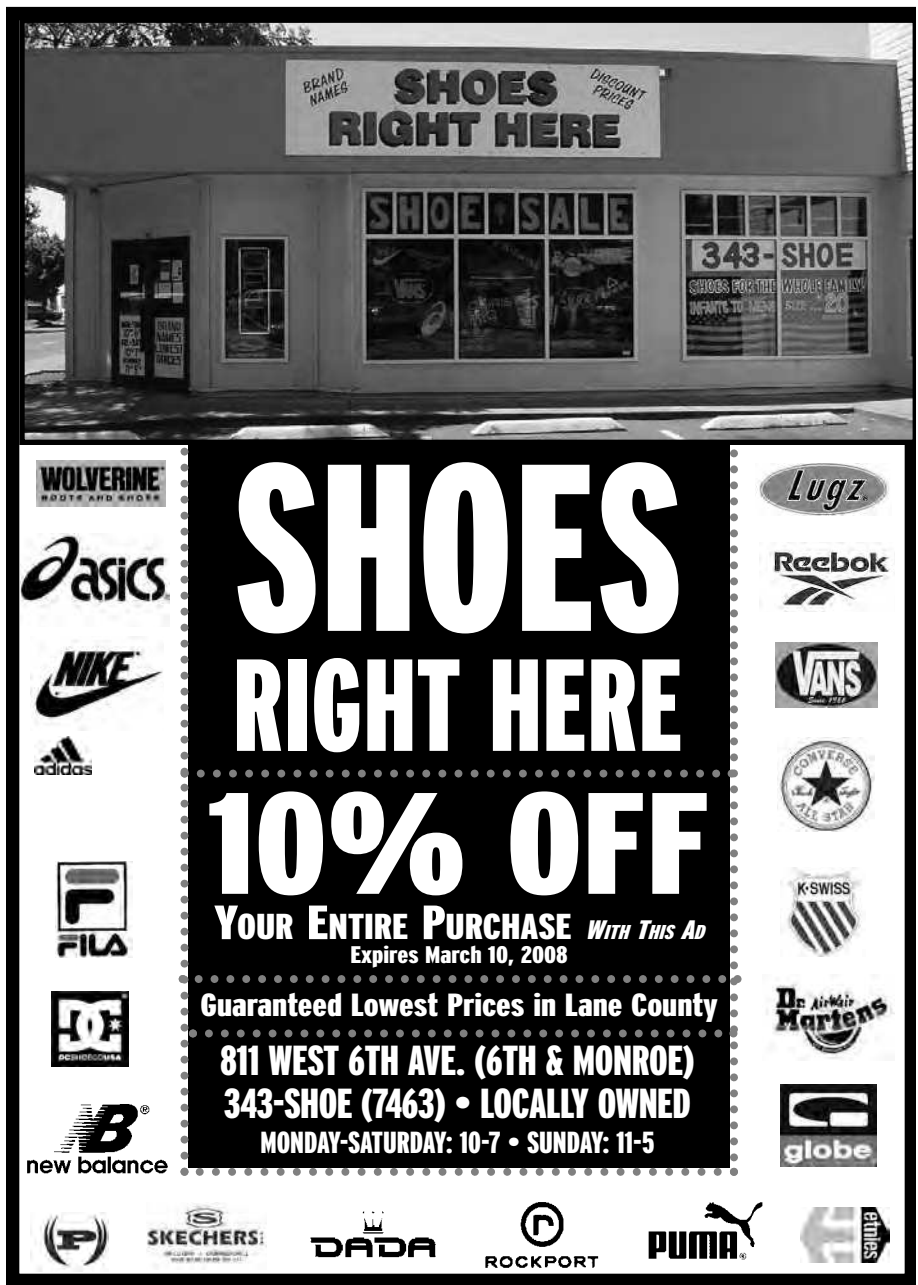
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**Brendan Gleeson
and Colin Farrell in
*In Bruges***

Holed up hitmen await their fate

IN BRUGES: Written and directed by Martin McDonagh. Cinematography, Eigil Bryld. Music, Carter Burwell. Starring Colin Farrell, Brendan Gleeson, Ralph Fiennes, Clémence Poésy, Jordan Prentice and Jérémie Rénier. Focus Features, 2008. R. 107 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

There's charm to be found in playwright (and short-film Oscar winner) Martin McDonagh's *In Bruges*. But it's not the charm you'll be expecting if you've been to the movies in the last few months and have been battered by the film's loud, madcap trailer. It's not the first time a trailer has misrepresented its film, and it certainly won't be the last, but here it seems particularly disconcerting. A joke-laden, quirky shoot-out, *In Bruges* is not. But in all fairness, it's probably a bit harder to sell a dark comedy that's also a touch sweet and philosophical in its consideration of what might be enough to make a hitman want to take himself out.

As that depressed, angst-ridden hitman, Ray, Colin Farrell hunches himself into a heavy overcoat, his thick eyebrows forming a tent atop his worried, boyish face. Other characters refer to him as the kid, and he certainly seems like one as he slouches through the Belgian town of Bruges, a stunning, quaint place his colleague Ken (Brendan Gleeson) is happy to traipse around, guidebook in hand. Ken and Ray are in Bruges because their boss, Harry (a dry, steely Ralph Fiennes), has sent them there following a screwy hit. They are to hang out in a lovely family-run hotel, poke around and be available when Harry calls for them. But with the competing lures of culture and sights (for Ken) and a pretty girl and the pub (for Ray) out there, staying in and waiting for a phone call is rather difficult.

In Bruges is a film in love with its setting, with the beautiful old buildings and looming churches and dark canals of Bruges, dripping

with fog or brightly lit by a film crew shooting a surreal movie within the movie. It's on this strange set that Ray meets Chloë (Clémence Poésy), gorgeous and slightly mysterious. Against the film's solid threesome of recognizable male leads, the sweet-faced but regal Poésy (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*) is a surprise and a standout. At dinner with Ray, who seems incapable of not saying the first thing to come into his mind, no matter how offensive, she holds her own and then some, mischievous sparks in her wide eyes.

Brendan Gleeson (speaking of actors from *Harry Potter*; and hey, look, there's Lord Voldemort!) is an earthy, paternal presence as Ray's semi-mentor; he brings gravity to the film when it turns in the direction of a smart-mouthed Guy Ritchie flick. McDonagh (whose plays include *The Pillowman*) sets his film's strengths in the darker parts of its dialogue; sometimes, the jokes seem to be still waiting on their punchlines, though that gives many scenes an appropriately off-kilter feel. But nothing about *In Bruges* would be particularly memorable or interesting were it not for the wounded Ray. He's snotty and rude, brash and violent, and yet he's so ruined by the hit that landed him in Bruges in the first place that he becomes sympathetic as he wrestles with notions of sin and salvation, heaven and hell (a Hieronymus Bosch exhibit gives a slightly heavyhanded kick to Ray's agonizing). He's an ass, the film lets the character remind us over and over again, but does he deserve to die for that — or for a deadly mistake? Harry's strict principles aside, that's about as thoughtful as *In Bruges* gets. Never mind how Ray became a hitman in the first place; it's how he agonizes his way into not being one that, for this diverting moment, matters. **EW**

In Bruges *opens Friday at the Bijou.*

