

FILM LISTINGS



★ is CityBeat staff's stamp of approval.

GANGS OF NEW YORK — It's man (Gangs of New York) against mythical creatures (The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers) in two year-end film epics competing for audiences' attention, and man wins hands down. Scorsese's sprawling American epic focuses on the Lower Manhattan neighborhood of Five Points. On-screen, Leonardo DiCaprio's hero Amsterdam Vallon pales next to Daniel Day-Lewis's villain William Cutting. In fact, Day-Lewis' fiery performance is the main reason to see the film. — Steve Ramos →

CAPSULE REVIEWS AND SUMMARIES BY TT CLINKSCALES, RODGER PILLE AND STEVE RAMOS

8 MILE — (Grade: C) A lulling screenplay sabotages the big-screen debut from rapper Marshall "Eminem" Mathers III. In *8 Mile*, Jimmy "Rabbit" Smith uses Rap as a way to escape his life a trailer park punk. Brittany Murphy wiggles and jiggles as the pretty girl who believes in Jimmy's talent. What Murphy fails to provide is a dramatic counterpart to Eminem's pent-up anger and youthful rebellion. Kim Basinger shrieks her way through her performance as Jimmy's unemployed mother. Mehki Phifer is the best thing about *8 Mile*, playing the friend who pushes Jimmy to pursue his Rap career. Eminem has more than enough charisma for an acting career. What he needs is a credible drama. The irony is that screenwriter Scott Silver based *8 Mile* on Eminem's own story. — SR (Rated R.)

★ 8 WOMEN — (Grade: A) Director Francois Ozon unites eight of France's leading actresses — including Catherine Deneuve, Isabelle Huppert, Emmanuelle Béart, Virginia Ledoyen and Fanny Ardant — for *8 Women*, a lively, laugh-out-loud whodunit inspired by classic MGM musicals. Ozon's script (adapted from a 1960s crime play) is pure Agatha Christie. The matriarch Gaby (Deneuve) is preparing to spend Christmas at her estate with her daughters (Ledoyen and Ludvine Sagnier), her complaining sister (Huppert) and her absentee husband. *8 Women* jolts into action after the husband is discovered murdered in his bedroom. *8 Women* offers only routine suspense. Of course, its greatest joys are the song-and-dance numbers performed by its cast. When Ardant performs a jazzy number inspired by Rita Hayworth's performance in *Gilda*, it's impossible not to smile. — SR (Rated PG-13.)

ANALYZE THAT — (Grade: C) Mobster Paul Vitti (Robert De Niro) not only cry, but also sing a medley of *West Side Story* songs in *Analyze That*. The sequel to the 1999 comedy *Analyze This* reunites the cast and director Harold Ramis back for dysfunctional family therapy. Vitti fakes insanity after repeated attempts on his life in prison and he is released into the care of Dr. Ben Sobel (Billy Crystal). There are laughs as Vitti attempts to become a productive member of society and Sobel again gets entangled with the "reformed" mob boss. By the film's finish, its lackluster story leaves you searching for a climactic punch line. *Analyze* all you want, but the effective chemistry between Crystal and De Niro only goes so far. — RP (Rated R.)

★ BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE — (Grade: B) Documentary filmmaker and expert muckraker Michael Moore connects a series of interviews and TV news footage into a passionate and scathing expose about America's obsession with firearms. The student shootings at Colorado's Columbine High School is the focal point for Moore's film *Bowling for Columbine* but its best scene belongs to a tense interview between Moore and National Rifle Association head Charlton Heston.

Moore's travels throughout the United States and Canada include lively visits to a Michigan bank that gives away guns with new accounts and an interview with organic farmer James Nichols, a friend of the Oklahoma City terrorist Timothy McVeigh. Moore is basically pickflicking in *Bowling for Columbine*, but it's some of the most entertaining and thoughtful pickflicking you'll ever see. — SR (Rated R.)

DIE ANOTHER DAY — (Grade: C) Early in *Die Another Day*, the latest James Bond adventure, the iconic British spy appears unshaven, dirty and beaten. There's not a tuxedo in sight, and you get the impression that director Lee Tamahori wants to shake up actor Pierce Brosnan

and the sleepy Bond franchise. But a familiar formula remains Bond's greatest nemesis, and it's not long before *Die Another Day* slips into another comic book plot about a crazed mastermind holding the world hostage thanks to a deadly new weapon. *Die Another Day* delivers more thrills than a recent action dud like *I Spy*, but with the exception of Halle Berry's performance as the spy, Jinx, *Die Another Day* is riddled with stunts, characters and plot twists that have become familiar Bond clichés. — SR (Rated PG-13.)

★ DRUMLINE — (Grade: B) Screenwriters Tina Gordon Chism and Shawn Schepps' tale of a Harlem drummer (Nick Cannon), who travels to a prestigious Georgia college in order to play in their marching band, is a rare surprise in a season filled with sequels, familiar faces and overdone plots. Nick Cannon is strong-willed and charismatic as an egotistical drummer who comes of age during his freshman year at college. Zoe Ljajcic is his girlfriend who wants to study dance despite the objections of her parents. Orlando Jones shines in a rare dramatic role, as the band's director who has to balance his artistic integrity with the wants of the university's alumni. Their stories come together neatly in a climactic band contest that deftly balances old-fashioned drama, youthful pizzazz and credibility. — SR (Rated PG-13.)

THE EMPEROR'S CLUB — (Grade: D) There is no better delivery boy for well-intentioned hokum than the likable Kevin Kline. In director Michael Hoffman's adaptation of Ethan Canin's short story "The Palace Thief," Kline gives an earnest performance as a classics professor at a boy's prep school struggling to teach his students good morals. Unfortunately, Kline's believable role is quickly swallowed by screenwriter Neil Tolkin's trite story. *The Emperor's Club* is a follow-the-noble-teacher drama that's predictable to the point of annoyance. Emile Hirsch is the best thing about this sugary film, playing an affluent troublemaker who disrupts the school until Kline reaches out to him during a school-wide academic contest. Hirsch's character is the one clever bit in a movie that's formulaic drivel. — SR (Rated PG-13.)

EMPIRE — (Grade: F) In writer/director Franco Reyes' *Empire*, cocky drug dealer Victor Rosa (John Leguizamo) has a hard time recounting his career switch from the drug trade to high finance. Victor also has a hard time figuring out when he's getting played by the Wall Street slickster Jack (Peter Sarsgaard) and his all-too-obvious femme fatale Trish (Denise Richards) or his Columbian supplier Joanna Menendez (Isabella Rossellini) and her brother Rafael (Nestor Serrano). Basically, Victor's not smart enough to tell his own story, and it's certainly not as complex a story as he thinks it is. In *Empire*, his debut film, Reyes appears to be striving for gangster noir with a distinct Latin flavor, but the film looks dim and amateurish. Just like Victor. — ttc (Rated R.)

★ FAR FROM HEAVEN — (Grade: A) Its heartfelt story makes *Far From Heaven* more than a paint-by-numbers homage to 1950s Douglas Sirk melodramas. Dennis Quaid gives a realistic performance as the secretive husband. Moore is rock solid as Cathy, the wife determined to maintain her family's status quo. Dennis Haysbert, as the gardener who befriends Cathy, delivers the film's most satisfying performance. Cinematographer Edward Lachman re-creates 1950s suburbia with dazzling beauty, but Haynes keeps the film focused on its storytelling. Moore has teamed with Haynes before, playing a sickly housewife battling toxins in the film *Safe*. Her performance in *Safe* was powerful, but her work in *Far From Heaven* is close to perfection. Moore uses the period clothes, hairstyles and rigid dialogue as a launching pad for something rich and unforgettable. — SR (Rated PG-13.)

FRIDA — (Grade: C) While Salma Hayek captures an airbrushed approximation of Frida Kahlo, director Julie Taymor (*Titus*) supplies *Frida* with a sense of true artistic vision. Several imaginative set pieces, such as those surrounding the bus accident, which severely disables Kahlo, have a creative energy that connects the painful reality of Kahlo's life into the body of her artwork. Unfortunately, the physical trauma and the emotional anguish of her marriage to the adulterous muralist Diego Rivera (Alfred Molina) fails to register through Hayek's performance. *Frida* benefits from the supporting work of Molina, Geoffrey Rush as Leon Trotsky, and Roger Rees as Frida's father Guillermo Kahlo. At the film's center, Hayek only strikes poses and turns the story into a static, and ultimately rather ordinary, portrait. — ttc (Rated R.)

→ **GANGS OF NEW YORK** — (Grade: B) Director Martin Scorsese's sprawling period drama, *Gangs of New York*, is a story of gang leaders battling to make their bloody imprint on 1863 New York City. *Gangs* has its share of disappointments but I'm eager to watch it a second time. Its story follows the battle between an upstart gang leader, Amsterdam Vallon (Leonardo DiCaprio), and Five Points' longstanding kingpin, William "Bill the Butcher" Cutting (Daniel Day-Lewis). DiCaprio is getting all the attention as the scrappy Vallon, but *Gangs* ultimately belongs to Day-Lewis. With a thick mustache and a worn top hat, Day-Lewis brings the Butcher to life with a high-wire act of creepy charisma and hot-tempered violence. He packs more than enough gusto to match *Gangs*' detailed street life. — SR (Rated R.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS — (Grade: C) At the risk of being turned into a Cornish pixie, I'm just not entertained by the *Harry Potter* film series. The sequel *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, which follows Harry (Daniel Radcliffe) during his sophomore year at Hogwarts, is another meandering story. The art direction alone almost makes the two-and-a-half hours worthwhile, but director Chris Columbus still seems more interested in filming every detail from the book than in telling a great story. I guess if you build those enormous, elaborate sets, you'd want to film every inch of them. The on-screen talent still do well, creating characters that stand out from the colorful backgrounds. If only the story line could do the same. — RP (Rated PG.)

THE HOT CHICK — (Grade: F) Let's put this in perspective: When I sat through *Dude, Where's My Car?* last year, I did find myself laughing a couple times. In *The Hot Chick*, not once. That really says something when a film can't manage one funny or inventive moment in its 100-minute running time. The loose plot revolves around Rob Schneider's dude body-swapping with some sexy women, the sub-genre that produced '80s fluff such as *Like Father, Like Son* and *Vice Versa*. Here's a hint: when you're stealing from Kirk Cameron and Judge Reinhold, you know you're in trouble. — RP (Rated PG-13.)

★ INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE — (Grade: B) Until Harrison Ford reprises his role as globe-trotting archaeologist Indiana Jones — something that's beginning to look more and more likely — director Steven Spielberg's likable 1989 adventure will serve as the latest Indiana Jones tale. Written by George Lucas and Philip Kaufman, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* pairs Ford with Sean Connery as Jones' archaeologist father, Professor Henry Jones. The father-and-son adventurers are after the Holy Grail. That is, if they can beat the Nazis to the punch. — SR (Rated PG-13.)

★ INTO THE DEEP — (Grade: A) A screen that's six stories high by eight stories wide plunges audiences into an undersea forest of kelp that sways and teams with far more life than could be imagined in still photos or in other televised media. Two huge projectors achieve the 3D effect. And thanks to Newport IMAX Theaters' stadium seating, the images stream along above the heads of those in front of you. Curiously, as the beautifully exotic ecosystem expands before your eyes, the sensation is similar to being suspended in a deep-sea diving tank with your face pressed close to the glass. It may take supreme exertion of will power to not reach out to touch the fish or plant life that passes before you. Submit to the visual pleasures first. The commentary can be informative, but *Into The Deep* is, foremost, a feast for the eyes. — ttc (Unrated.)

★ JANE GOODALL'S WILD CHIMPANZEES — (Grade: B) An OMNIMAX update on the 1990 National Geographic documentary *Jane Goodall: My Life with the Chimpanzees* complements the story of Goodall's career as a researcher at the Gombe National Park in Tanzania with beautiful footage, vibrant colors and spell-binding images of the African landscape. Archival footage shows Goodall being sent to Africa by Dr. Leakey in 1960 at age 26. She stayed there for three decades. *Jane Goodall's Wild Chimpanzees* is the most subtle of OMNIMAX films. Because it has an engaging story that's equal to its widescreen photography, there is no need for dizzy

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