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ENTERTAINMENT TODAY

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SINCE 1967

FEAR AND LOATHING IN LOS ANGELES

THE GONZO ISSUE



We're chockfull of true grit:
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photo archives, a new limited-edition
Gonzo book, artist Ralph Steadman,
and a few surprises along the road...



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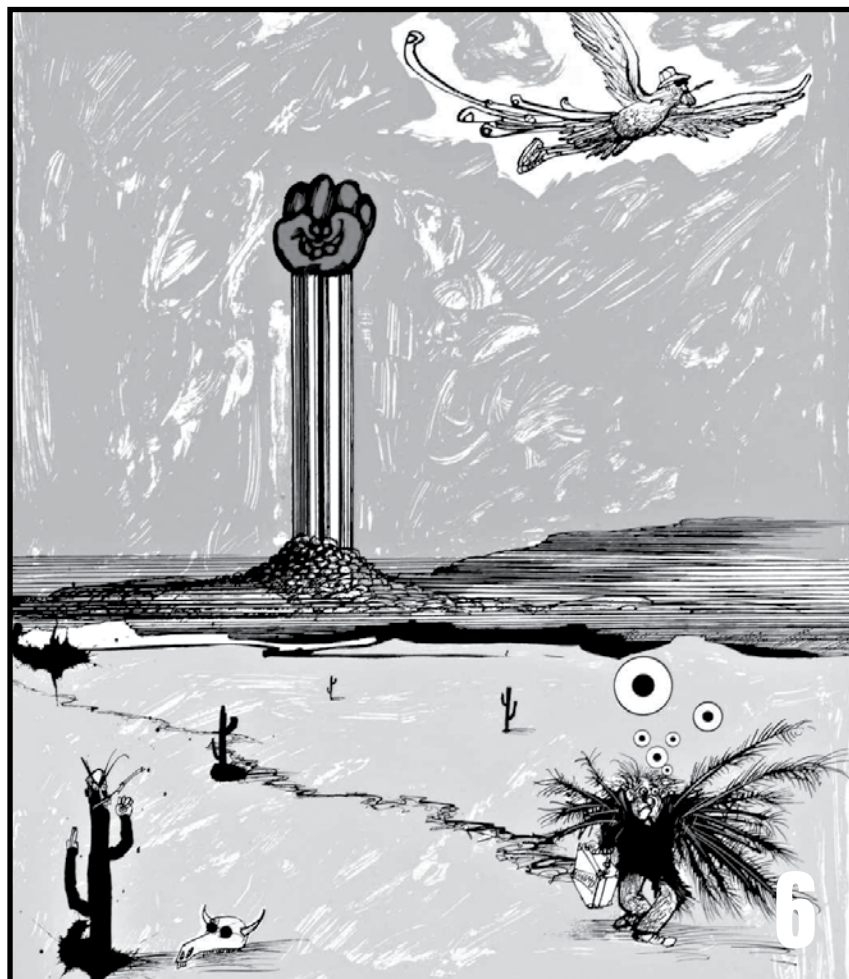
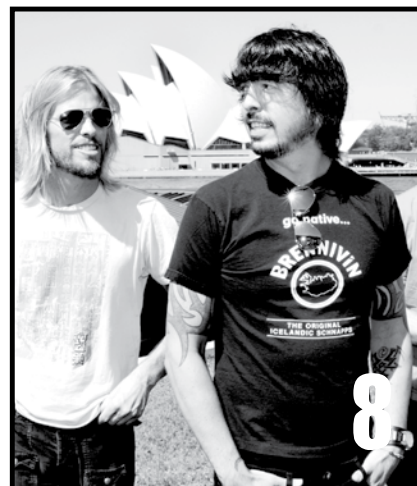
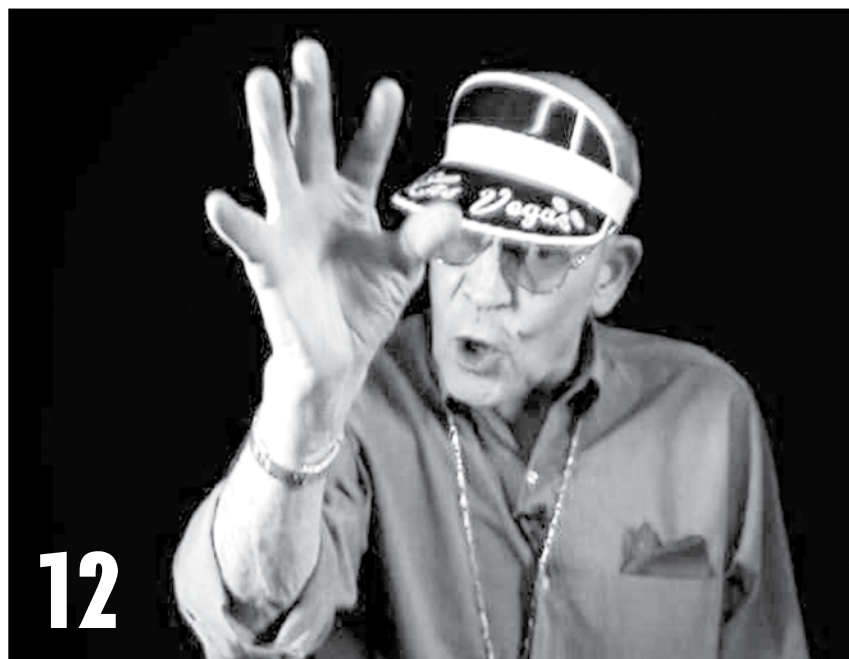
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There are few writers in the American coterie who have been placed on the pedestal of rock stars. **Hunter S. Thompson** accomplished more than simply altering Western Literature as we know it with his brash, vitriolic, and ultra-personal accounts of the most tempestuous times of modern history—he became a part of the very history he covered, and will be forever emblazoned in the collective consciousness of our society. There's a new limited edition book out that only people Hunter would've shot had they come to his door can afford, but there's also a photo show now running for the rest of us plebeians. **Billie Stone** and **Joseph Trinh** tell us the score and what's next on both these fronts.

22 - 23 FROLICSOME FUN

Popgriddle Crossword Puzzle, The Voice of Astrology with **Rita Ann Freeman**, Sudoku, and Comics.



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THEATER

HIS ROYAL HIPNESS

LORD BUCKLEY IN LOS ANGELES AT M BAR BY TRAVIS MICHAEL HOLDER



Bop is back in a most urbane fashion as Lord Buckley returns from the dead for one last gig, daddy-o.

GET THE SHTUPPING OVER WITH

BY TRAVIS MICHAEL HOLDER

JUDITH: A PARTING FROM THE BODY AT THEATRE OF NOTE



Judith: A Parting from the Body plays at the Theatre of Note for those interested in the macabre.

As Holofernes prepares for the Battle of Assyria in 150 BC in Howard Barker's *Judith: A Parting from the Body* at Theatre of NOTE, the title character sneaks into his tent to proffer sexual favors to the gloomy and distracted General. Based on the biblical Book of Judith, the Israeli widow offers her body in hopes of getting a heads-up with Holofernes so she can get

his head off. Filled with lovely poetic dialogue but not offering much to say about the situation that has left historians arguing for centuries, Barker's take on Judith's final grisly act is fascinating, but the play ultimately leaves its audience in the same condition as after a tasty Chinese dinner: hungry an hour later.

The American-born 1950's lounge performer Lord Buckley was a true anomaly, with a cult following of ardent admirers around the world who worshipped his bizarre nightclub act that presented him as a cool-cat, jive-speaking British royal who retold classic stories in urban bebop and with the backing of a jazz combo. Now before retreating into total obscurity with the passing of time and such rabid fans as Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, George Harrison, and Frank Sinatra, Jake Broder has done the world a remarkable service: bringing the legend back to life with his knockout *Lord Buckley in Los Angeles*, now making the ultra-hip M Bar in Hollywood even hipper with its presence.

Having already received high critical and audience acclaim playing under more geographically appropriate names in London and New York, Broder adds local LA references to the repertoire as he lovingly adopts the unique persona of Lord Buckley himself, complete with snappy tux and a once appropriate cigarette balanced in the same hand that grasps his microphone. As Broder launches into the story of Jonah and the Whale (who smokes a European spliff in the body of the beast), waxes poetic about Mahatma (The Hip Gan) Gandhi, conjures the Pidepiper in New Orleans, and retools Lanky Linc's Gettysburg Address into Buckley's "hip semantic," an amazingly smooth trio plays incredible

riffs to accompany the text, with Ryan Feves on bass, Derek Yellin on piano, and Mark Sanfilippo all looking typically jazzband-bored behind him. Occasionally, Broder joins in the music making as well, not only proving himself to be a finely gravelly jazz singer, but a musician adept at wailing a mean saxophone and plunking out plaintive notes on the piano.

Of all the possible choices for a holiday-themed destination this season in El Lay, this is the place to go for people who enjoy more adult fare, a wonderful throwback to the days of the old Playboy Club (without the secondhand smoke, of course), a sensation made even more festive by the M Bar's dynamite martinis and incredibly delicious dinner fare. Broder actually begins the evening with Lord Buckley's delightful take on Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, which finds such treats to modernize the old tale as Tiny Tim crocheting little scenes on his crutches. As Broder-Buckley tells us with a wink of the eye, "By second spook, people are starting to get it"—and getting into the pulse of the matchless ultra-beat style that made this Lord such an underground sensation 60 years ago. *R*

M Bar is located at 1253 N. Vine St., Hollywood; for tickets, call (323) 856-0036.

As Judith, Julia Prud'homme brings a powerful presence, alternately sweetly seductive and jarringly coarse, particularly noteworthy after her prey lies decapitated under the same pillows meant to soften the couple's lovemaking. Possessed of a voice that could charm wild beasts and alternatively bark baritone orders to her servant with the force of a military conqueror herself, Prud'homme is mesmeric from her first entrance to her final bow. Krista Conti brings a constant electricity as Judith's pushy servants, who desperately wants to get the *schtupping* over as quickly as possible so she can parade Holofernes' head around to the gathering troops. Conti succeeds spectacularly juxtaposing her character's patriotic resolve with a necessary dose of comic relief, especially striking in one glorious monologue aimed directly out front to the audience, bouncing off the immediate reactions from the viewers seated only a few feet from her.

Erin Brewster's ethereal set design and Hiwa Bourne's sensually gossamer costumes add immeasurably, but director Tom Beyer, one of the most inventive and continuously pitch-perfect theatre artists in LA, is the creative glue elevating *Judith* from inconsequential

to unforgettable. His signature imagination and humor infuses the work of Prud'homme and Conti but seems to have gone over the head—no pun intended—of Mark McClain Wilson as Holofernes, who drags the piece down with his broodingly wooden and one-note performance that recalls one of those old Italian B-movies starring Steve Reeves as Hercules. His work is the unfortunate Achilles' heel of this otherwise worthy production, which could have been so much more interesting with an actor cast in this pivotal role capable of conjuring up a real multifaceted character rather than insisting on playing a dimensionally-challenged cardboard hero. *R*

Theatre of NOTE is located at 1517 N. Cahuenga Bl., Hollywood; for tickets, call (323) 856-8611, ext. 4.

Travis Michael Holder has been writing for ET since 1990. Also an award-winning actor and playwright, the first of his five plays produced in LA, Surprise, Surprise, is about to begin the festival circuit as a feature film with Travis in a leading role.



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TELL US ANOTHER, GRANDPA

BY BILLIE STONE

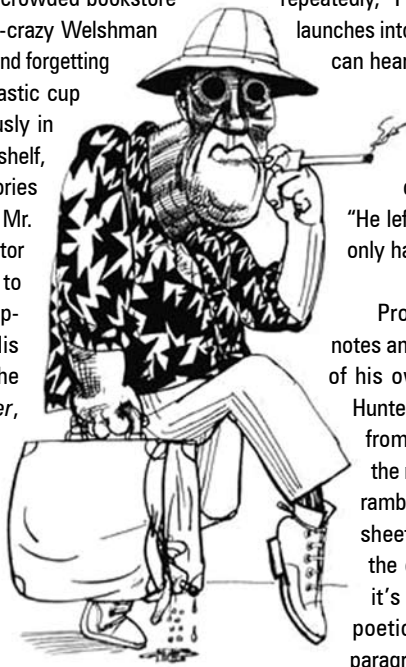
RALPH STEADMAN AT BOOK SOUP

Halloween's the one night of the year that the random and bizarre barely get a second glance. But I never thought that on this particular All Hallows' Eve that I'd be standing in a small, crowded bookstore in Hollywood listening to a half-crazy Welshman attempting to sing sea shanties and forgetting the words. Yet there I was, plastic cup of red wine balanced precariously in hand as I leant against a bookshelf, listening to the soporific war stories of the mumbling and soft-voiced Mr. Ralph Steadman—Gonzo illustrator extraordinaire, right hand man to the late, great Hunter S. Thompson, and general crackpot. His reading was a celebration of the pre-release of *The Joke's Over*, a book that contains much of Steadman's vast portfolio of manic ink scrawlings.

It was a distinctly older crowd that filled the room—clearly long time Steadman fans—and while some had grown out of their tie-dye by now, there were definitely a few members of the group still longing for the good ol' Free Love days (or maybe one of those places for tired-out, droopy old hippies that we only see in re-runs of HBO's *Real Sex*).

Ralph eventually makes his entrance, shuffles on up to the lectern wearing an old floppy fishing hat

(displaying a diamante brooch), and a homemade necklace from which hundreds of charms and objects dangle. Apologizing for his late arrival, he mumbles repeatedly, "I don't want to be a bother..." and launches into a strange whispered song no one can hear or understand. Announcing that he was partly there to "Debunk the Gonzo Myth," he added his thoughts on Hunter's untimely death last year, saying sadly that, "He left at the wrong time. The job was only half done..."



Producing a stack of unorganized notes and papers, he begins to read some of his own writing, of which he added Hunter had said sounded like "gibberish from an old woman gardening." For the most part, I'd have to agree. It's a rambling art history lesson about broad sheets and political satire, and while the content itself is rather intriguing, it's not exactly written in the most poetic writing style. Prefacing each paragraph with, "This is good stuff..." Steadman's delivery is erratic and sweet—he seems a little confused and flustered, not knowing which thing to read next.

He proceeds to read some of his personal letters from Hunter, and the real reason there is such a large audience on a Wednesday night becomes clear: Everyone has hoped to catch a little bit of HST's magic,

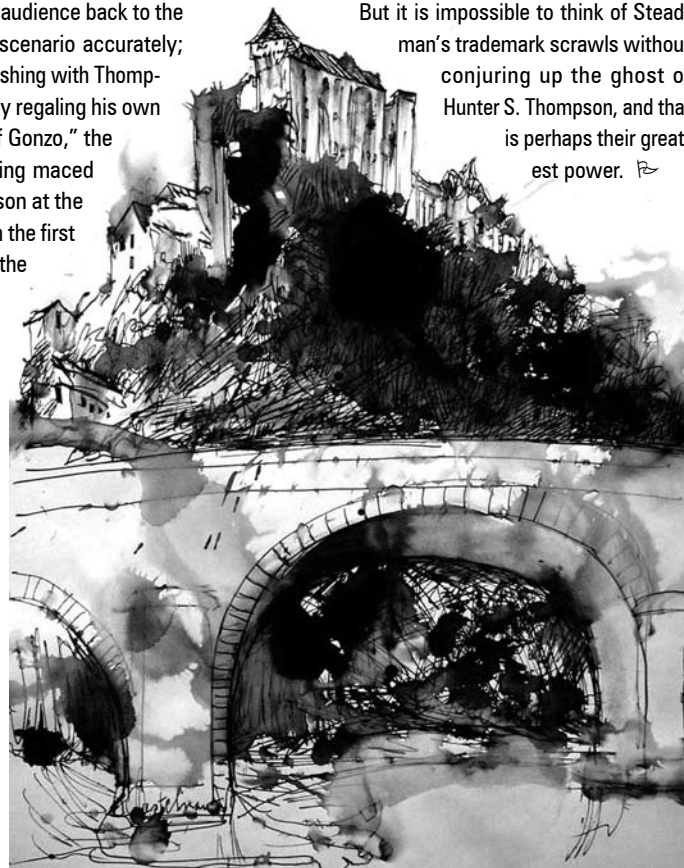
hopes that somehow it will rub off on those who can find such close propinquity to Hunter's right-hand man from all those weird adventures.

Steadman reads an amazing collection of letters and anecdotes, easily transporting his audience back to the incident. We can imagine each scenario accurately; Steadman's frenzied illustration meshing with Thompson's hypnotic storytelling. Proudly regaling his own involvement in "the beginnings of Gonzo," the artist tells his true account of being maced and kicked out of a car by Thompson at the infamous Kentucky Derby of which the first Gonzo story was written. He tells the story of Hunter stuffing a dead dog dressed in a full Santa suit down an unsuspecting chimney one X-Mas eve. This becomes story time for grownups, and we eagerly listen with rapt attention to his torrid accounts of a colorful past with one of the most die-hard party animals and most magnetic personalities of our time.

At the end of the evening, about the time when Ralph again broke into song, I had the feeling that this is what it's like to be stuck with somebody else's eccentric Grandfather. Without the familiarity of family, you're

forced to listen patiently as they put you to sleep with their tales of the good old days. He is a sweet old man and has produced a fearsome portfolio of drawings that have become national treasures.

But it is impossible to think of Steadman's trademark scrawls without conjuring up the ghost of Hunter S. Thompson, and that is perhaps their greatest power. *PS*



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RICHARDS TAKES HIS COFFEE BLACK

BY ERIK DAVIS



Kramer finds humor in everything except love.

Michael Richards Agrees to Meet the Men He Attacked!

In what reminds us of a *Seinfeld* episode, **Michael Richards** has agreed to meet with the targets of his recent racist tirade in order to apologize and offer them free coffee for life. Richards, along with the two African-American hecklers, will meet one another, and a retired judge will serve as mediator. A retired judge? Why not get the actor who played Kramer's attorney Jackie, film the thing, and air it as a lost *Seinfeld* episode? Unlike Richards' comedy act, *that's* something people would actually pay to watch.

Will Smith Shoots Down More Aliens!

Though the gesture was well intentioned, **Will Smith** has decided to turn down **Tom Cruise's** request for him to get jiggy with Scientology. The reason? He didn't want it to completely ruin his career. No, actually, Smith felt his deceased Grandmother would be upset. Seriously. Says Smith, "I've talked to Tom about it—[there's] lots of incredible, wonderful concepts [but, my wife] Jada and I don't necessarily believe in organized religion. I was raised in a Baptist household, and my grandmother would get up out of her casket [if I became a Scientologist]." Oh Will, why can't you just say Tom is nuts, and you're not about to go jumping on Oprah's couch. At least then people would actually believe you.

Lohan Spotted Attending Alcoholic Anonymous Meetings!

In an attempt to appear to be cleaning up her rowdy image, **Lindsay Lohan** has started attending Aloholics Anonymous meetings—oh wait, were we allowed to say something? Aren't these folks supposed to be *anonymous*? Anyway, let's see how many of those 12 Steps she actually follows...and should Staying Away from **Paris Hilton** be included as Step 13? Here's hoping Herbie is only half loaded the next time we spot her out on the town.

And This Week's Golden Donkey Goes To...

...**Danny DeVito**. The New York papers were calling him *Danny DeVino* following the actor's recent appearance on *The View*. Apparently, DeVito was up all night partying with **George Clooney**, and subsequently showed up to the morning talk show wasted, sleep-deprived, and slurring something about destroying the Lincoln bedroom at the White House. So, for getting hammered, appearing on *The View* and *not* insulting

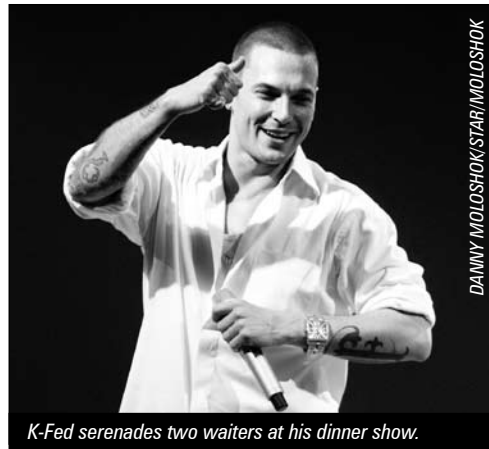
Barbara Walters (What? A boy can dream, right), Danny DeVito is this week's biggest ass.

That Thing Called Love

Love, sex, marriage, divorce—and that's just the first week of your average Hollywood romance. Here's what's swirling around the rumor mill this week...

Kid Rock broke up with **Pamela Anderson**, and everyone is blaming **Borat**. Look, Borat isn't the answer; the real reason is quite simple: Kid Rock is a moron. While the two have only been married for three months, they both shocked the world with this split (round these parts, folks felt they would last at least five months). Pam's side says Kid was too jealous and had a bad temper. Meanwhile, Kid's side says the has-been rocker was fed-up with being Mr. Mom while Pam was off doing God-knows-what. Whatever the case may be, **Tommy Lee** should wind up back in the picture in no time.

Was **K-Fed** cheating? No, say it ain't so—we desperately wanted to believe that the man was an honest to God saint. Oh yes, the saga continues to get weirder and more absurd by the day. While **Britney Spears** (who is a mother of two, mind you) is out partying like a rock star alongside **Paris Hilton** with no panties on, rumors are beginning to crop up that claim **K-Fed** was sleeping with porn star **Kendra Jade** a month prior to the couple's actual split. Could this be why Britney broke it off? He's shacking up with a porn star, she's shacking up with a porn star—is it just us, or are these two made for each other? At least they have one other thing in common—neither one will ever sell another hit record.



K-Fed serenades two waiters at his dinner show.

Hey, what's the best thing to do following a recent break-up? How about reuniting with your ex and getting engaged? Well, that's what **Eva Longoria** and **Tony Parker** decided to do. Yes guys, Longoria is officially off the market, the couple has finally decided to get hitched. Now, the reason behind their recent break-up makes complete sense—she wanted to get married and he didn't. We bet there was even an ultimatum that he ignored. Who could blame him—the guy is only 24-years-old. And she's 31. Great, now she can finally become a real desperate housewife...only the desperate ones here are the folks that get to sit at home wishing they were Tony Parker. Wait, that's us—never mind.

Quote of the Week: **Anna Nicole Smith** during a recent interview on *Entertainment Tonight*: "I think I might be pregnant again...Did that just come out?"

WELCOME BACK "Y'ALL"

BY FRANK BARRON

If "y'all" love Kyra Sedgwick as LAPD's resident sugarcoated steel magnolia Brenda Johnson, then "y'all" can look forward to the return of *The Closer*. Now airing Tuesday nights, the hit cable drama is back on TNT with re-broadcasts of the second season that follows Deputy Police Chief Johnson as she traps the bad guys with her Atlanta-bred Southern charm. But as skilled as she is at cracking high-profile crime cases, she is at a loss to solve the problems that plague her personal life. This is why she takes comfort in ravaging chocolate Ring Dings, just one of the many quirks that makes her so endearing.

Sedgwick says it was important to make her character relatable, so that audiences would want to invite her back into their living rooms week after week. The Emmy-nominated actress points out that her TV persona is "peculiar and unorganized. She's a closet snack hound, and she is someone who is hugely talented and brilliant at her job while fumbling through her personal life, and socially awkward in some situations."

Season six of the laugh/cry-out-loud series *Scrubs* has just been launched as part of the two-hour Thursday night comedy block on NBC, along with *My Name is Earl*, *The Office*, and *30 Rock*. Although *Scrubs* star Zach Braff has ventured into making movies, he says he still has fun as the show continues to be crammed full of unpredictable creativity.

As outrageous as things get, Braff explains that it is a show with a big heart, "because it's all about great friendships. As broad as we get [with our comedy], and as serious, it's really about getting through the challenging parts of your life with the help of your friends." Braff, 31, says that's a lesson he has learned.

Bill Lawrence, creator/executive producer of the series, adds, "For six years, Zach has been playing a man/boy, and it's his friends and the people around

Emmy-nominated Kyra Sedgwick, *The Closer*.

him who are forcibly dragging him into adulthood." Donald Faison, Sarah Chalke, Judy Reyes, and John C. McGinley are among the cast members helping Braff through his growing pains.

In addition to helping put together fan-pleasing bonus features on the *Scrubs* DVD's, Lawrence has another project he's passionate about: He's producing *Nobody's Watching*, an Internet comedy that became popular on YouTube with phenomenal downloads by an increasing swarm of adoring fans.

The concept of *Nobody's Watching* centers on Derek and Will, two young TV addicts who are frustrated with the dreadful state of television programming. "They decide to become part of a reality show which gives them the opportunity to create their own sitcom for a major network," Lawrence describes. "Thus begins their crusade to develop what they hope will be great television."

Sounds more like a fantasy to me. *FB*

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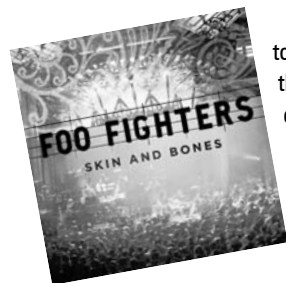
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FOO FIGHTERS CUT TO THE BONE

BY RACHEL CAMPBELL



I recommend a pretty powerful system to support the Foo Fighters' latest offering, the live *Skin and Bones*. My woofer-less PC didn't really do it justice, and it wasn't until I listened to the album in my car over Turkey Day Break that I remembered how much I liked the quiet orgasm of "Razor."

So, yeah, quite the opening track, but it's a promise frustratingly unfulfilled. *Skin and Bones* sounds fantastic for a live album, don't get me wrong: You can hear every penny in the production; but that's part of the problem. It's too clean, and the album is too aptly named: Not a lot of meat on these joints. This is weird from the Foo's, and—save for one track—it's pretty much a superfluous, superfan-only entry in the canon; a yawn for a scream.

Unlike the acoustic half of last year's *In Your Honor*, this bare-bones production rarely works. On "My Hero," frontman Dave Grohl can't help but roar out of his croon; the softer song's composition never catches on or up. The end product is a sad one; that is, if you're into disillusion.

But for my money, the original version off *The Colour and the Shape* hit too many arena-rock chords of perfect fury to go down so quietly. Ditto "Times Like These," notwithstanding the "Day In The Life"-style strings; and while the original "Next Year" (off 1999's *There Is Nothing Left To Lose*) has a sweet, summer-afternoon nostalgia, this update is too Xanaxed-out to care.

Then again, when "Big Me" gets sweet and lowdown, you forget all about that Mentos parody music video (well, almost). And there's a nice tension to "Everlong," with Grohl's grinning, whispered delivery that edged

on a hiss. It's only when Grohl mutters at the close of track 13, "I can't let you guys get off without screamin' at you for a couple minutes," that *Skin and Bones* reaches a sublime acoustic desperation: This live version of "Best of You," in its way, blows the original out of the water. It is the sole transcendent track off the album, and was what click-and-choose MP3 technology was designed for: The rest of *Skin and Bones* I can more or less take or leave, but that "Best of You" is 99 cents very well spent. *R*



DANIEL BOUD

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Cherie Currie
The Bangles
The Donnas
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*Rhino Bucket
*The Binges
*Carmine & Vinnie Apicce & more special guests!!!

WED 12.13
Plain White T's
with **OneRepublic & William Tell**
(formerly of Something Corporate)

SUN 12.10
SOME GIRLS
Mika Miko
FAST FORWARD SABERTOOTH TIGER

MON 12.11
Jimmy Gnecco
of Ours
with **Saucy Monkey**

THURS 12.14
smile empty soul
32 Leaves / Wired All Wrong / Failsafe

SUN 12.17
1st ANNUAL A.C.O. CHRISTMAS PARTY
ANGEL CITY OUTCASTS
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WHISKEY REBELS SOCIETYS PARASITES
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THURS 12.21
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THE SEEDS
THE WOOLLY BANDITS
SONS & LOVERS
THE GROWLERS

THURS 12.28
A GLOBAL THREAT
Career Soldiers
Mouth Sewn Shut

FRI 12.22
MY MEXICAN MERRY MEX-MAS WITH
EL VEZ
WITH GUESTS HUMAN HANDS

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(EX-A STATIC LULLABY)
AUDITORY APHASIA
COSMONAUT (EX-FINCH)
JESUS MAKES THE SHOTGUN SOUND

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12.30.....KENT BURNSIDE & THE NEW GENERATION

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1.5.....JOE FIRSTMAN

1.6.....BLUEBEAT LOUNGE 4TH ANNIVERSARY WITH LA ALLSTAR REVUE

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FRI 12.15
GERTIE FOX
THE POWER CORDS
DANIEL BRUMMEL (OF OZMA)
UGLY LOVE

SUN 12.17 Church of the 8th Day Presents...
NURSES / THE JUNE ECHO

WED 12.20
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Rex Merriweather (Left) Russell Nakaoka (Right)

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NOTHING INDEPENDENT ABOUT THE SPIRIT AWARDS

BY JESSE ALBA

The nominations for the Independent Spirit Awards were announced November 28th, in the Sofitel Hotel, at 8:30, on a particularly cold LA morning. The press, a legion of photographers, and members of the Spirit Awards Nominating Committee gathered before a podium where Don Cheadle and *Desperate Housewives'* Felicity Huffman would announce the nominees.

Award shows never ultimately decide anything substantiating, but they can certainly attract the public's attention in a marketplace oversaturated with small projects, and this can weigh heavily on a picture's chances of being seen...as well as the chances of the actors, crew, and filmmakers involved having an opportunity to make another film. Film Independent (who are responsible for both the Spirit Awards and the Los Angeles Film Festival) is but one of many duplicitous organizations backed largely by corporate sponsors, that recognize films "made by filmmakers who embody independence and who dare to challenge the status quo."

The qualifications for nominees are predictably ambiguous, and coupled with questionable perspectives within the ineffectual nominating committee, the roster, process, and flaccid committee themselves represent yet another example of a film community not so much at stand-still, but rather in a state of detached, aimless floating. No longer a conduit for the Common Man to express himself in his own unique manner, the very idea of an operating "independent film" body today has become as laughable as pecuniary.

In essence, everything backfired. Suddenly, "independent film" meant only one that was not necessarily or directly backed by a studio...and nothing more. It now doesn't matter if you have big-name actors in your films (say, Don Cheadle), it doesn't matter if you are backed by a corporate company that might very well also have significant stock in neighboring studios, and it certainly doesn't matter one iota whether or not the content and form of your film is truly groundbreaking or innovative. *Harold & Maude* was backed by Paramount, *Clockwork Orange* by Warner Brothers. Are these films any less "independent" than than, say, *The Illusionist* or *Crash*?

It is in this sad, stagnant state of American culture that the faces of independent cinema congregate to hear the nominees for the 2007 Independent Spirit Awards. And just what do the faces resemble? Middle-aged (minus the smiling greeters), white, clean-shaven, slightly overweight, stodgy, pseudo-aristocrats. Not a single beard in the room.

The crowd quiets as a frazzled, older blonde woman, with pulled cheeks (she looks as though in between manicures), steps to the podium to announce the business at hand. She speaks in a lobotomized, rehearsed fashion, stumbles only once, her only distraction being a bit of stage shock before a veritable thundering wall of photographers snapping away before her. After her loquacious advertorial about "god bless Netflix," she introduces Cheadle and Huffman, who amble up to the stage to begin the announcements. The names of the nominees have



Huffman and Cheadle present the nominations.

already been printed in the press packets, meaning both Felicity and Don had a chance to learn the difficult-to-pronounce ones. This should be a relatively short, painless process...

Early during the list of nominees, the duo found some of the names particularly challenging. They repeat names, or pronounce a name incorrectly, sometimes making little jokes along the way. As the list continued to be read, the instances of name mishandling grew worse, but the actors only grew more alive and vibrant, getting off on their ridiculous malapropisms. They brought added attention to their misgivings, made light of each other—"Aren't we the worst?"—and crafted an almost immediately recognizable stage routine, alternating between Martin and Lewis. No one seemed shocked or embarrassed by the rampant butchering; the room was having fun with two big Hollywood stars. The committee members, press, and miscellaneous were having a blast mocking the reality of the situation. It's all just for fun anyway, right?

The filmmakers and the projects being honored? Not unexpectedly, *Little Miss Sunshine*, as it will probably be at the Academy Awards this year, was the cookie-cutter hip/cool darling. Along with that were the "big" indies such as: *The Illusionist*, *For Your Consideration*, *Thank You For Smoking* (which was actually pretty good), and *Half Nelson*. The rest of the nominees sounded as though a litany of nonsense so unimportant that, again, Cheadle and Huffman themselves had obviously never heard of them (and from the reaction of the crowd, neither had anyone else). The final nominee was announced and the photographers rushed the stage, eager to capitalize on some personal time with two stars who—as they had been all morning long—were more than happy to ham it up. After the carnival was over, people lingered around in the lobby of the hotel, or crowded into the valet line outside. "We'll have to get that on Netflix!" was heard here or there. At least *something* about the show worked.

The Awards are on the 24th of February, and I for one will be attending, eager to see the culmination of this experience. Before getting in my ride, I was lastly reminded that young filmmakers today have very few leaders to follow. This crowd in particular seemed devoid of passion or urgency, they sounded and looked like tabloid disciples who could probably correctly pronounce the name of Nicole Richie's former stylist correctly and without a single chuckle. ☞

DIE, NANCY MEYERS, DIE!

BY PETER SOBCZYNSKI

THE HOLIDAY

★☆☆☆
(1 out of 4 stars)

DIRECTED BY NANCY MEYERS

STARRING: CAMERON DIAZ, KATE WINSLET, JUDE LAW, JACK BLACK, ELI WALLACH

138 MINUTES, RATED PG-13

The Holiday is a bloated exercise in failed romantic whimsy that wastes so many precious natural resources that Al Gore could use it as the central subject of his next slideshow. It has a promising premise, a quartet of enormously appealing leads, and a writer-director whose previous efforts in the genre, while not exactly groundbreaking or daring, at least demonstrated a flair for slick, star-driven frothiness that got the job done with a minimum of fuss. However, in lieu of the lighter-than-air frolic suggested by those elements, we are instead presented with a lead balloon featuring woefully miscast actors and a plot that not only goes nowhere *but takes 138 agonizing minutes to get there.*

The Holiday was written and directed by Nancy Meyers, and while no one could mistake her previous films—including *What Women Want* and *Something's Gotta Give*—for works of art (her aesthetic can best be described as "Nora Ephron without the edge"), she at least demonstrated an ability for properly casting actors with enough personal charm and charisma to overcome for the script deficiencies. (*Something's Gotta Give* may not have been the finest hour for either Jack Nicholson or Diane Keaton, but both were so entertaining that it hardly mattered.)

In this long-running mess, Meyers has assembled a cast with unique and distinctive charms but seems to have no idea of what to do with them. On the surface, the idea of a romantic pairing between Kate Winslet and Jack Black sounds like a slam-dunk—how could you fail by combining Winslet's blend of fierce intelligence, winsome romanticism, and off-beat attitude with Black's headstrong goofiness and supreme sense of self-confidence? Easy. You turn Winslet into a spineless and weepy wallflower who just doesn't know what she wants, and you make Black into a neutered simp who constantly talks about how he can't believe how he could have wound up with such a hot girlfriend.

As though worried that some sparks might still wind up flying between the leads despite her best efforts, Meyers weighs down her two entwined storylines

with unnecessary subplots that add nothing to the proceedings but running time.

In a telling scenario, Winslet's character befriends an enfeebled old screenwriter (Eli Wallach) from Hollywood's Golden Age (he supposedly added the word "Kid" to a certain line of dialogue in *Casablanca*), and spends virtually all of her vacation time helping him get into shape for a big WGA tribute. As far as I can tell, the only reason for the inclusion of this character is so Meyers can offer up some trite criticisms about the commercialization of contemporary Hollywood (which ring especially hollow in a film that is as commercially calculated as any currently in release, created by one of the harpies who made the industry such a venal land of nonsense) while reveling in the joys of the classics and, by implication, somehow offering this feeble work as a continuation of those grand traditions. So much screen time is devoted to this particular plot thread, in fact, that the Jack Black character almost comes across as a third wheel in his own romantic tale, and you begin to wonder why Meyers didn't just eliminate him altogether and focus solely on the Winslet-Wallach relationship.

The Holiday is a dreadful disappointment that goes on for far too long, contains far too few moments of actual humor for its own good (it says a lot when the single biggest laugh comes from an unexpected cameo from a well-known star) and features one of the most reliably exciting actresses working today, Kate Winslet, in what is by far the least interesting work that she has ever done.

And yet, because it is virtually the only large-scale romantic comedy of the season, I have no doubt that it will clean up at the box-office. The fact that this Kate Winslet film will probably make more in one day than her other current effort (the amazing *Little Children*) has grossed in two months is especially vexing.

However, that says less about the quality of the film and more about the fact that audiences are so starved for this kind of story that they will happily line up for one as shabby as this effort. Early on in *The Holiday*, we see Diaz's character at work putting together a mock trailer for what appears to be a hideous thriller starring Lindsay Lohan. I'm here to tell you that as intentionally cheesy and dopey as that faux preview looks, I would gladly watch that fake movie over this real one in a heartbeat. ☞



Cameron Diaz takes a relaxing bath as she wonders why she turned down *Charlie's Angels 3* for this flick.

PASSION OF THE GOY

BY PETER SOBCZYNSKI



Rudy Youngblood (center) and Morris Bird (right) in Mel Gibson's ultra-violent period piece, *Apocalypto*.

APOCALYPTO



(3 out of 4 stars)

DIRECTED BY MEL GIBSON

STARRING: RUDY YOUNGBLOOD,
DALIA HERNANDEZ, CARLOS EMILIO BAEZ,
RAOUL TRUJILLO, RODOLFO PALACIOS

138 MINUTES, RATED R

Apocalypto, Mel Gibson's highly anticipated directorial follow-up to *The Passion of the Christ*, feels like a project that was initiated by Terrence Malick and hijacked halfway through by Eli Roth. There are scenes of extraordinary visual beauty that capture the rhythms and feel of a culture alien to us in such an effortless manner that it feels as though we have actually been plunged into the jungles of pre-Colombian Central America and are observing the natives' activities first-hand.

At the same time, the film pummels us into submission with so much gruesome violence that the mere act of sitting through it will seem to many viewers as much of an endurance test as any of the various tortures experienced by the characters on the screen. The result is a highly ambitious and viscerally exciting exercise in pure adventure and purer beauty that even the hardest audience members may find themselves peeking at through the hands covering their eyes.

Set during the end days of the Mayan civilization, *Apocalypto* opens with a half-hour segment that plunges us without hesitation into the unfamiliar terrain. A small group of hunters pursue an elusive tapir and finally bring it down with an elaborate booby trap that is the first of the film's gory surprises. We see the easy camaraderie between the men as one is tricked by the others into consuming the animal's testicles in the belief that it will help him get his wife pregnant. We see their uneasiness as members of another tribe wander past and speak of how their own land and people have been ravaged. We see them as they return to their village and rejoin their families and we focus on one—Jaguar Paw (Rudy Youngblood)—as he is welcomed back by his extremely pregnant wife, Seven (Dalia Hernandez), and their young son (Carlos Emilio Baez). Everything is so peaceful and tranquil (unless you happen to be a tapir, of course) that any student of action cinema knows that something horrible is just around the corner.

That something horrible occurs the next morning when the village is attacked by another tribe, led by imposing warrior Zero Wolf (Raoul Trujilo) and the exceptionally sadistic Snake Ink (Rodolfo Palacios, who bears an uncanny resemblance to the ubiquitous screen

villain Michael Wincott), who proceed to slaughter most of the inhabitants and imprison the rest. Jaguar Paw is among those captured, though he has enough time to lower his wife and child into a deep pit so that they can avoid detection. After a long and arduous trek through the jungle, the prisoners are brought to the vast and teeming city belonging to their captors and discover that they are meant to be sacrificed by the local high priest as an offering to the gods to end the drought that is ruining their crops. ("Sacrifice," in this case, means having your chest sliced open, your still-beating heart being torn out and held before your eyes, and your head sliced off and thrown down the temple stairs to the throngs below—a sight we are treated to in intense detail.) Through a couple of twists of fate—one celestial and one the result of sheer luck—Jaguar Paw manages to escape his captors and races into the jungle, with Zero Wolf, Snake Ink, and others in hot pursuit, in a desperate attempt to rescue his family from the pit—a pit that is rapidly flooding thanks to both a torrential rainstorm and Seven's water breaking.

Some have attempted to read *Apocalypto* as Gibson's meditation on contemporary events, by equating the Mayans—a once-proud culture undone by the decadence of their leaders and their willingness to promote bloody power plays against their neighbors without fully estimating their tenacity or willingness to defend their way of life—with any number of current world leaders and their own questionable actions. This is valid enough, I suppose, but I think that the best way to approach *Apocalypto* is to set political considerations aside and look at it simply as an adventure tale in the tradition of *The Most Dangerous Game* and similar stories in which Man, traditionally the hunter, finds himself the hunted and is forced to use his wits and primitive skills in order to survive.

On that level, the film is a sensational work that takes the most basic and primitive of all story ideas—a man is brutally wronged and gets revenge on those responsible—and breathes new life into it by putting it in the context of something that we have never seen before. The early scenes, in which Gibson introduces us to the characters and, by extension, their very way of life, are impressive in the way that he crams in an incredible amount of detail almost purely by visual means. Although the dialogue that we hear is a Mesoamerican dialect as remote as the Aramaic employed in *The Passion of the Christ*, the narrative is so instantly relatable and the actors (almost entirely non-professionals) say so much with their physical presences alone that the English subtitles that have been provided are hardly necessary. *P*

DVD

THIS WEEK IN DVD'S

BY MIKE RESTAINO



There is controversy surrounding *Star Trek: The Animated Series* (Paramount): Are these twenty-two episodes part of the *Star Trek* canon, or not? According to Paramount and official *Trek* fanboys, the answer is "no"—the 526 minutes of entertainment on these cheesy-as-all-get-out cartoons is meant to be novelty and engaging flippancy, not official *Star Trek* business. Oh, yeah—and I forgot to mention: This animated *Star Trek* series is terrible. If you're a die-hard Trekkie/Trekker, I won't blame you for picking this up (I'd purchase a *Twin Peaks* animated series sight unseen any day of the week), but anyone with less than a pulsating devotion to William Shatner's screen presence needs to pass on this set. If you do decide to buy it, you'll get admirably capable transfers, pointlessly panoramic 5.1 surround mixes (what's worse than a crappy monaural cartoon track?: A 5.1 cartoon track), and an intriguingly-designed box that will sit next to your full *Star Trek* collection on DVD quite nicely. I have a bone to pick, though: Most *Star Trek* on DVD comes with excellent bonus features, but the audio commentaries, trivia tracks, and supplemental featurettes here are seriously lacking. Dammit, Jim!

Though many of the inclusions here are full-blown clunkers (nobody with a functioning brain stem deserves to have to sit through *Die Another Day* more than once), **The James Bond Ultimate Edition: Volumes 1 and 2** (MGM) are nevertheless exceptional box sets in their own shaken (not stirred) way. *Goldfinger* and the unfairly maligned *The Living Daylights* are filmic highlights of the first volume (*Diamonds Are Forever*, *The Man With the Golden Gun*, and *The World Is Not Enough* are also here), while silly reigns supreme in volume two (*The Spy Who Loved Me* and *A View To A Kill* tower above more humdrum entries *Thunderball*, *Licence to Kill*, and the aforementioned *Die Another Day*). But regardless of which Bonds are your personal favorites (the final two volumes of these *Ultimate Editions* are slated for release on 12 December), as James himself would have preferred, these box sets are all about class. None of the ten films here have ever looked better—*Goldfinger*'s new Anamorphic upgrade alone is worth its set's \$90 price tag—and the DTS 5.1 mixes afforded each picture are pitch-perfect. Also, the voluminous bonus features will keep Bond fans occupied until the follow-up to the now-in-theatres *Casino Royale* is released in 2008: Each picture not only comes with all the goodies that were included on earlier Bond DVD releases, but each also houses new goodies—most notably the exceptionally entertaining Roger Moore commentary on *A View To A Kill*. Yeah, you may have bought an earlier incarnation of these films, but have Miss Money Penny get out your pocketbook: These *Ultimate Editions* are well worth the upgrade.



At this point, affording accolades to Criterion Collection releases is a redundant act: The Chicago-based CC is film-as-art's home entertainment patron saint. And the company's latest triumph is the double-disc treatment it offers the late Krzysztof Kieslowski's masterwork **The Double Life of Veronique** (Criterion). Bestowing the lovely film with an appropriately lovely widescreen transfer and an appropriate stereo sound mix are only the first two of many steps Criterion takes to make this 2-DVD edition a glory to behold. Kieslowski biographer Annette Insdorf's commentary is jam-packed with tidbits of information on the master director's style and history; Kieslowski's three short documentary films included here are revelations (as is *The Musicians*, a film made by Kieslowski's filmic teacher/mentor Kazimierz Karabasz); and two lengthy documentaries and a handful of interview segments—as well as the film's U.S. ending (yucko)—give this release the sheen of a veritable must-own. If I stop by your house and this one isn't on your shelf, I'll slap you. And just ask the staff of *Entertainment Today*: I slap hard.

I'm of a right mind to call *Six Feet Under* the hands-down worst hour-long drama of the last ten years, but if you're drugged and desperate enough to search out **Six Feet Under: The Complete Series** (HBO), the only thing I can do to stop you is remind you that you haven't watched that DVD copy of *American Beauty* on your shelf since you bought it at Target five years ago. But hey—this set has everything: Marvelous transfers (the first two seasons in 4x3 full-frame and then a widescreen final three), robust 5.1 mixes, and a shitload of commentaries, featurettes, and deleted scenes (not to mention a *Six Feet Under: In Memoriam* book and two (!) soundtrack CD's). And the box is cool—it has a bit of AstroTurf at its top, complete with faux gravestone. So HBO product designers: Well done. Alan Ball, on the other hand: *Suck it* (but don't take literally).





CAN'T WE ALL AFFORD GONZO? by JOSEPH TRINH

Hunter S. Thompson, the man, killed himself on February 20, 2005. Surely this is not news to any of us interested in writing, living on the edge, and, of course, America.

Gonzo, a gigantic 200+ page book (in a hard, blazingly blue cloth-wrapped "clamshell box") chronicles the journalist's life, and is comprised mainly of snippets of his work and photographs. Along with everything else, HST was a compulsive collector who, like an obsessive pack rat, recorded everything--and kept it all in his private archives. For the first time, the public will be able to take a glimpse of the man who we before thought put everything out on the table--but now, posthumously, presents those little moments and intricate/intimate relics to which we've never before been privy.

Does this book capture the central, unfiltered truth of the man behind the erratic, drug-fueled, larger-than-life character that we've seen propagated throughout the years in book after book, article after article, film after film? Honestly, I can't say; the book's \$300, and I'm a writer bringing in less than a writer's salary. If you get a chance to see it, let me know what it's all about. I might get you a beer.

(CONT'D ON PAGE 13)



(CONT'D FROM PAGE 12)

Thanks to the efforts of its magnanimous publisher, I was granted a brief glimpse of the huge bound collection of photographs and clips from Thompson's work. Included are random photos of Hunter from his early 20's until his untimely death, extremely personal Polaroids of friends and families, and a bevy of Fear & Loathing goodies such as Hunter's actual hand-written notes, the first few pages of the type-written (and messily "corrected") manuscript, and business cards, "Please Do Not Disturb" signs, and plenty of certificates commiserating Hunter's becoming a Doctor of Divinity and his participation in the Fateful Drug Awareness Convention in Vegas.

With productions such as Terry Gilliam's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas and Art Linson's Where the Buffalo Roam engendering a kind of eulogy of the American Dream as presented by Thompson, larger audiences were given a chance to experience the torment and frenetic adventures of the writer at a strangely duplicitous time in our history in which the culture was at its zenith and nadir concurrently (think A Tale of Two Cities, if you must). But, never before has the public been given the opportunity to really investigate the man who before was always the observer, even though he many times (whether intentionally or not) became part of the story he covered.

During my quick scan of Gonzo, I was overcome with the profound sense of a man rummaging through another man's bedroom drawers, seeking out his journal to read his thoughts. And, for the most part, these inner-most thoughts can be found in the book. Some of the quieter images of Hunter on his boat fishing, or in his living room cleaning his gun seemingly present us with the man behind the words that are behind the caricature that is Dr. Hunter S. Thompson.

With a reworking of his words from past works, we are treated with what almost amounts to a re-issue of the same descriptions of, and warnings against the institutions that Thompson loathed through the decades. From a corrupt central government bent on destroying the future of the nation to the tools of which they use to achieve this objective—namely the Armed Forces—the words of the Good Doctor remain forever immortalized here, along with brilliant images from his electric life.

For many of us who have our own collection of Hunter's writings, this is a nice addition to any archive, complimenting the images of longtime collaborator Ralph Steadman quite nicely. Though this limited 3000 run of books is priced at a whopping \$300 a pop—ensuring that it will be purchased only by, ironically, those very Rotarians, art snobs, avaricious book publishers with oversized foreheads, and corrupt lawyers that HST so abhorred throughout his life—there are plans to eventually release the collection in a smaller version that will be much more affordable for you and me. This is good news, because I'm sure that there are more than just 3,000 fans of the man.

More information about Gonzo available at www.AmmoBooks.com.

BUY THE TICKET, TAKE THE RIDE by BILLIE STONE

Unlike movie stars and pop singers, few authors gain much media attention, preferring to let their words speak for themselves. Not so in the case of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson... His iconic personality—that manic, drug-crazed raconteur of which we're all so familiar—is inseparable from his work. Through his writing, we travel along with Thompson on his dangerous adventures and ill-advised assignments, and we revel in his reprehensible behavior. We feel his paranoia and rage, we root for him as he speeds for the state line—and more than anything, we feel a kind of special kinship with the man. Coinciding with the recent release of Gonzo, a new book showcasing Hunter's personal collection of photographs and memorabilia, is an exhibition of his work at M+B Gallery that gives fans a rare chance to get to know our old pal a little better.

The opening night of the show was in perfect LA style; this is the Hollywood you see in the movies. Up-and-coming musicians, pretty young starlets, goateed agents in too tight sport coats—everyone schmoozing and scoping the scene. In true Gonzo tradition, the bar was stocked only with Beer and Wild Turkey, which was consumed with abandon by the crowd. Adding to the night's buzz was the presence of true Hollywood royalty: Anjelica Huston and Bill Murray, the latter having played the late Dr. Thompson himself in Where the Buffalo Roam. (I gotta say, it was a life-defining moment to be standing in line for the bar with Bill.) After cruising the collection, KD Lang bought one of the limited edition books, available for the first time at the exhibition.

While we are so familiar with the words of Thompson, this show gives a rare insight into the mind of the famed writer. We see his stories in vivid color, sometimes conjuring a strange and intoxicating sense of déjà vu. It is a pleasure to find that Thompson was a talented and powerful photographer, yet hard to imagine that he could operate a camera at times.

We see his writing desk and beat-up typewriter perched on a cliff in Big Sur. We see candid and vulnerable self portraits (one after a beating by the Hell's Angels); we see shots from innumerable Road Trips and exotic locales. We experience the Hell's Angels as one of the gang, and go hunting wild boar. We get a real sense of Thompson's particular brand of humor with some photos—a naked girl wears a rubber Nixon mask talking on the telephone as she sits on the toilet, or the Fear and Loathing still-life in which a copy of the book rests on a lush red backdrop with Thompson's pistol and a handful of bullets placed on its cover.

Throughout the evening, a compilation of Thompson's favorite songs played in the background to enhance his imagery. The musical selection contained many time-honored, anthemic 60's songs and were culled from a previously released collection of the author's choice—it was an ideal accompaniment to the images on display. I have to admit that there were a few moments throughout the night, where fuelled by the images and the perfect song and, yes probably the Wild Turkey—I had to control myself from saying "Fuck Yeah!" out loud.

It was a dark day for Thompson fans when the author chose to end his journey early last year—yet his legacy continues to live on. His stories, while often politically topical and most definitely of their own time, will thrill and entertain us forever and continue to attract new readers to become part of the timeless legend. But it seems that Hunter—perhaps unsurprisingly—had another ace up his sleeve. His photographs are yet another gift from a man who grabbed life by the balls and invited us along for the ride. And what a ride.

Photography by Hunter S. Thompson runs until January 20, 2007 at M+B, North Almont Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90068; 310.550.0050; www.MBFALA.com.

*And while there, if you should run afoul of a droopy-eyed, lanky, hunched-over homunculus who resembles a demented cross between Gumby and Brian Grazer in black Converse All-Stars, make sure to smash a pie in his face for Entertainment Today!

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Leonardo DiCaprio in his thirtieth film this month, alongside Djimon Hounsou as they try to outrun the horrible Blood Diamond chasing them.

10 Items or Less

★★★ (R)
10 Items or Less is a lighter *Lost in Translation* (one wonders whether the naming of the “Scarlet” character is a veiled homage). Where *Translation* transported its characters to a far off place, *Items* stays grounded in Los Angeles. And the story in *Items* takes place over the course of one day, thus, lacking time to develop the relationship between the characters meaningfully. And where Bill Murray was able to marvelously inject his character in *Translation* with such incredible longing and sadness, Freeman never quite goes far enough to lift his character beyond parody. It is important to think back on the roles Freeman often inhabits and understand that he rarely plays someone who isn’t in total control of his environment. But, luckily writer/director Brad Silberling smartly never forces the characters into an uncomfortable romance that a lesser film may have tried. And the film’s saving grace is that it’s fun to watch Freeman flit about mocking himself. (JH)

Apocalypse

★★★ (R)
 Please see our review on page 11.

Babel

★★ (R)
Babel is a film that starts off with great promise and then winds up playing things relatively safe; there are moments at the beginning that suggest the ambitious panoramic scope of DW Griffith’s grand 1916 epic *Intolerance*, but it soon turns into something more akin to a multi-national *Crash*. (PS)

Backstage

Not Yet Reviewed (Not Rated)
 Emmanuelle Seigner (*Ninth Gate*, Polanski’s wife) plays a Blondie-esque underground superstar who finds a young admirer played by a French actress whose name you won’t be able to pronounce anyway won’t leave her be. We follow their intertwining stories as they two grow closer and closer in this Cesar-nominated French film about Frenchness. (MK)

Blood Diamond

★★★ 1/2 (R)
 If you’ve been keeping up with Hollywood-relat-

ed news, you know that Ed Zwick’s latest film, *Blood Diamond*, has been making some waves. On one level, it is an entertaining action-drama with some fine acting performances that has critics talking about Oscars. On another level, the movie offers a sociopolitical message about international diamond trading that has major diamond companies chomping at the bit. While it would have been very easy for *Blood Diamond* to become another preachy political film a la *Syriana*, Zwick and the producers created a film that weaves the entertainment and message together. The hardest part for viewers may be the swift transitions between scenes of quiet dialogue and lengthy battles. Come Oscar time, *Blood Diamond* will receive mention—you don’t want to miss this film. (JB)

Bobby

★★★ (R)
 At first glance, the *Nashville*-esque storyline of *Bobby*’s 22 main characters might as well instead be called *Ambassador*, after the Ambassador Hotel where the film is set and where Robert Kennedy was assassinated on June 4, 1968. The characters in Emilio Estevez’s *Bobby* form a microcosm of 1968 America as they amble through the famous hotel the day of RFK’s assassination. The film indistinctly draws parallels between Vietnam and Iraq, but is relatively free of a proselytizing point of view. Film clips of RFK on the campaign trail are interspersed with the character’s scenarios, giving a sense of Bobby’s rock star charisma. (MM)

Borat

★★★ 1/2 (R)
 Ultimately, *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* is more than a one-note joke in that the inventive Sacha Baron Cohen finds new and often funny ways to get Borat into trouble. And built around the funny improvised skits is a cohesive narrative that endears with the audience the main character and his traveling companion producer. Irreverent and purposely insulting to those featured in the film, *Borat* is the funniest film I’ve seen all year. (JH)

Breaking and Entering

Not Yet Reviewed (R)
 There have been only two instances in which I literally fell asleep during a movie in the theater.

(Well, three instances: but, I don’t count the time I was working a special-ed arts camp and was taken to see *Shrek 2* and fell asleep before the credits even began: way too much vikes that day.) The first instance was when I was a much younger man, and it was during a viewing of *The English Patient*. Apparently, I snored so loudly that my dad and step-mother later told me that a few of the audience members were snickering. The next time I fell asleep in the theater was at a special screening at a studio or something and it was for a movie I had not heard of that had yet to be released: *The Talent-ed Mr. Ripley*. It wasn’t until I was awakened and later spoke with friends that I was told that both films were directed by the same man: Anthony Minghella. *Breaking and Entering*, directed by Minghella, is thus a film I shan’t see...unless I’m having trouble sleeping that night. And Minghella looks like one of the Goomba’s from the *Super Mario Bros* movie with Dennis Hopper and Bob Hoskins. (MK)

Candy

★★★ (R)
 Candy, also known as Charley, Smack, Junk and Brown Sugar, is a nickname for a dangerous substance. Candy is heroin. In fact, Candy is also the name of the film’s heroine (get it?) with whom our hero falls in love with. The clever title says it all: this is a tragic love story about heroin. Heroin acts as the third element in a love triangle – a force which initially acts as the glue that fuses the lovers together, but ultimately rips them apart. Based on the thinly veiled autobiographic novel by Luke Davies, we follow the lives of Dan and Candy whose romance begins in an intoxicated whirlwind of highs. Like many artists before them, this poet and this painter are drawn to the drug and aren’t responsible enough to consider the consequences. And though you don’t condone their dangerous habit, you can’t help but be intrigued by the characters, even enamored by their young love, thanks to the magical chemistry between Heath Ledger and Abbie Cornish. (CR)

Casino Royale

Not Yet Reviewed (PG-13)
Layer Cake’s Daniel Craig as the toe-headed Bond ’06 in a dramatic re-telling of the famed “first 007 installment.” (MK)

Curse of the Golden Flower

★★★ 1/2 (R)
 Not since Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran* have I been so enthralled by the intrigues of a royal family from East Asia. This year’s Oscar contender from China is definitely worth a visit to the cinema. *Curse of the Golden Flower* plays like a great Shakespearian tragedy; filial piety, incest, and deceit—all solid ingredients for a melodrama of epic proportions. Director Zhang Yimou takes us to the 10th century during the Later Tang Dynasty and into the walls of the Forbidden City, a palace geographically lodged in the heart of Beijing, but a world spiritually far away from the reality of war-torn China. Here, the golden-clad Emperor and Empress keep up their perfect charade for the entire country to see, but on the inside, their repressed hatred for one another is bound to explode, and so it does...as bloodshed ensues on the eve of the Chrysanthemum festival. (CR)

Deck the Halls

Not Yet Reviewed (PG)
 TV (the instantly cancelled but absolutely delicious *Clarissa*—the follow-up to *Clarissa Explains it All*) and film (*Big Momma’s House 2*) director John Whitesell gives us this season’s prototypical “silly Christians fighting over silly Christmas stuff because they’re neighbors and have to compete with each other for who can be more obnoxious during Christmas” holiday movie. Danny DeVito and Matthew Broderick star as the dads in contention whose kids—over the course of the film—will definitely more than once go, “Daaaadddd!” and then run up to their respective rooms to blast Marilyn Manson or whomever the studios think kids listen to today when they’re angry. You know, one of those movies. (MK)

Deja Vu

★ 1/2 (PG-13)
 When will Hollywood stop using science-fiction merely as a device to tell just another average action chase story? Probably never, I would guess. Tony Scott’s latest—the 80-million dollar *Déjà Vu*—uses the concept of an intra-universe wormhole to give us an endless series of car chases and crashes. It is a film that cruises on a goofy, dumb energy, and treads heavily on the charisma of its star. Absent Denzel Washington’s presence, in fact, no one would even bother to see this movie. Certainly no one would take it the least bit seriously. (JH)

The Departed

★★★★ (R)
 The film is a tough, hard-edged, and decidedly

adult wonder that respects the conventions of gangster films and director Martin Scorsese’s past work while finding ways of tackling them anew. The result is not only one of the best films of the year, but one of the best films of Scorsese’s illustrious career. Based on the acclaimed 2002 Hong Kong thriller *Infernal Affairs* (as well as elements from the source’s two sequels) and relocated to Boston, the film gives us Jack Nicholson as a gangster heavy who sets in motion a series of events that lands police mole Leonardo DiCaprio in almost as hot water as Nicholson’s own mole, played by Matt Damon. Though *Departed* boasts a stellar cast, the real star here is Scorsese, who once again shows why he is generally considered to be the greatest American filmmaker working today. (PS)

Family Law

Not Yet Reviewed (Not Rated)
 Daniel Burman’s final film in his trilogy on fatherhood. (Don’t worry, we’ve never heard of this series, either.) Sounds like interesting stuff. Hailing from Argentina, film gives us the story of a father and son lawyer team; the problem? The father is such a great lawyer, that he overshadows the son. The other problem? The mom is such a great person, that she overshadows the son. Thus, the son is left without a real identity of his own. Will he find said identity? Only Aron Flasher knows for sure! (MK)

Fast Food Nation

★★★ (R)
 Richard Linklater’s film based on the best-selling non-fiction book of the same name (a kind of latter day *The Jungle* in its being a clarion exposé of the venal fast food industry) is an interesting episodic piece of satire. The filmmakers don’t cover nearly as much ground as its urtext, instead opting to concentrate on a nevertheless impressive number of narratives strung together in *Traffic*-like fashion. We see the Mexican immigrants coping with their existence as illegal aliens in their new home of America, we see the young kids working for barely enough to live off of in the restaurants themselves, we see the meat-packers, the ranchers, the marketing guys, and those at the very top. Though this spatter-painting approach of Linklater’s (and author Schlosser himself, who co-wrote the script) might be wholly appropriate for the subject matter, we nevertheless get a real sense of the characters whose stories are each spread so thin that the result is a little transparent. Then again, so too is the fast food nation in which we live, so perhaps it all works out in the rear end. (JH)



Qin Junjie (left) and Gong Li (right) in Zhang Yimou’s Curse of the Golden Flower.

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Flushed Away

Not Reviewed (PG)

Is it just me, or are all the posters for these computer-animated movies about talking animals starting to look exactly the same? In fact, they look very similar to the last few Nancy Meyers, Adam Sandler, Rob Schneider, and Wayans Brothers movies, as well. Isn't that nutty? (MK)

For Your Consideration

★ ★ ★ (PG-13)

For Your Consideration is a funny entry in the career of satirist filmmaker Christopher Guest, whose previous film, *A Mighty Wind*, was sporadically entertaining. *Consideration* finds Guest's usual assortment of actors playing not so far off parodies of Hollywood paradigms. The result is funny but also a little sad. Director Guest's consistency has become a kind of brand of sorts in the area of satiric spoof. And the cast he often uses gives into the comic goofiness enough to sell most any subject matter. Whereas the social importance of the spoof itself is lacking in this one, Guest and his talented cast create a film of laughs. (JH)

The Fountain

★ ★ 1/2 (PG-13)

Originally, *The Fountain* was meant to be a bigger film, at least a far more expensive production. Fresh from the critical success of *Requiem for a Dream*, writer/director Darren Aronofsky was set to make this new project with a reported budget of some \$75 million. The film was also to star Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett. Subsequent to these initial conditions, creative differences resulted in significant casting and script changes. For me, *The Fountain* is disappointing on an emotional level. Visually, it is a terrific accomplishment, but I never connected to the story. The narrative is a little confusing, and though the prospect of living forever is intriguing and the science part of the story is told in a credible way, the coldness of the entire production doesn't lend itself well to a moving love story. It feels very similar to Steven Soderbergh's *Solaris*; the characters all look like they love one another and feel very sad about the prospect of losing that one true love, but when the love is lost, the feelings of loss don't translate well to those of us in the audience. I felt nothing for the characters in *The Fountain*, and I felt strangely guilty about it. (JH)

Happy Feet

★ ★ ★ 1/2 (PG)

Though I don't recall hearing mention of it during all that sub-Hallmark hoey that Morgan Freeman was spewing throughout *March of the Penguins*, it seems that each penguin has his very own "heart song" that he sings in order to express who he is and to attract a mate. In theory, that may be wonderful, but what if you are a penguin that simply cannot sing and whose manner of personal expression appears to be tap-dancing? Will you be doomed to be ostracized forever from your flock, family, and the cute penguin you've been crushing on, or will your unique abilities somehow allow you to save the flock, reconcile with the family, and finally hook up with the cutie? These are some of the penetrating questions at the heart of *Happy Feet*, a decidedly odd and not-entirely-un-endearing animated film that plays like a

peculiar mash-up of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and *Moulin Rouge*. (PS)

The Holiday

★ (PG-13)

Please see our review on page 10.

Let's Go to Prison

Not Yet Reviewed (R)

Bob Odenkirk gives us Dax Shepard as the son of a career criminal who, along with daddy, must now contend with life behind bars in this comedic romp through the stripey hole. (MK)

The Nativity Story

Not Yet Reviewed (PG)

OK. I won't get too pissed-off here. OK. I'm calm, it's cool. No worries. A deep breath, and...all right. So, here's the low-down on this *piece of shit* (yes, I called it this without having seen it yet; that's right, I said it): Catherine Hardwicke (yes, the director of those double piles of steaming treacle *Thirteen* and *Lords of Dogtown*) has decided to take the blue streaks out of her hair and get extra-bubbly about (insert annoying southern belle accent here) "a young fourteen-year-old girl dealing with being impregnated by God in this story of the birth of Christ." *Jesus!* Mary is played by that little boy-girl from the equally execrable *Whale Rider*, Keisha Castle-Hughes, who—though only 16—is already friggin' pregnant with her 19-year-old boyfriend's baby! Maybe she'll make up a story of her own... (don't worry, I won't go there). *Finally*, who should have written this colossal affront to Christendom, but Mike Rich who penned: *Finding Forrester*, *The Rookie* (the one with Dennis Quaid, not Clint Eastwood), and the damnably invidious *Radio* in which Cuba decides to slap his face a few times and don Billy-Bob teeth in an effort to portray a real-life retard. My goodness, and I'm not even *Christian*, for chrissakes!! This is the first film ever to have premiered at the Vatican. (MK)

Off the Black

★ ★ ★ (R)

Off the Black isn't a perfect film. It meanders a bit, and the scenes at the climax don't have the right tone; although the always-solid Sally Kirkland shows up to brighten the material. Writer/Director James Ponsoldt smartly relies on star Nick Nolte's crusty personality to make his feature film debut touching and thoughtful. And Timothy Hutton's calm measured approach is a real plus. (JH)

The Queen

★ ★ ★ 1/2 (PG-13)

Able directed by Stephen Frears (*High Fidelity*, *The Grifters*) and written by Peter Morgan (*The Last King of Scotland*), *The Queen* gives us Helen Mirren as Queen Elizabeth II in a role that one would think was penned specifically to grant the beloved actress a definite Oscar...if it weren't based a person who already actually exists. The crux of the film takes place during the week after the tragic death of (ex) Princess Diana, a time in which progressive and modern English prime minister Tony Blair is already butting heads with the conservative and stogy Royals who rarely leave their palatial estate to see just what changes have occurred during the turbulent 1990's. *The Queen* has an intimate understanding of Diana's radiance, and shows

us the real woman behind the image through old stock footage, much of which is used to ground the film in a certain state of truth that shines bright and clear already through the fantastic performances and the impressive behind-the-scenes dialogue somehow culled by Morgan. The film gives us a more human Queen Elizabeth II, a more human Royal Family, and does something that I didn't think would be possible: made me feel a certain degree of pity for these people whose real enemy, as the movie (and supposedly Blair) implies, isn't the ghost of a woman who gave them nothing but grief and annoyance over the years, but themselves. (JH)

The Santa Clause 3:

The Escape Clause

Not Reviewed (G)

All right. You know what this movie is, you know what's going to happen, and you know that you're going to see Tim Allen make yet another ass of himself as he trundles about as Christmas' favorite mythological figure next to Jesus. My only question: How in the hell did they get a "G" rating? You *know* there's going to be at least a few farts, burps, kicks to the groin, etc. etc. And that scene in which Tim Allen sprinkles snow-colored blow on his chocolate cookies... I mean, if that's not "drug content," then I don't know what is. (MK)

Stranger Than Fiction

★ ★ ★ 1/2 (PG-13)

Stranger Than Fiction, filmmaker Marc Forster's latest venture, features an eclectic story with an even more eclectic cast. Where else can you see Will Ferrell romance Maggie Gyllenhaal while getting advice from Dustin Hoffman who admires Emma Thompson who's being babysat by none other than Queen Latifah? Well, the actors play characters who do accomplish these things in *Fiction*, a film that is bound to make America's over-cafeinated movie-goers feel awfully good this Holiday season. While not directly a Thanksgiving- or Christmas-themed film, *Stranger Than Fiction* is awfully good stuff, perfect viewing, as turkeys get nervous and obnoxiously enormous brightly lit trees are erected in capital cities around the country. (JH)

Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny

★ ★ 1/2 (R)

Tenacious D, the rock duo of Jack Black and Kyle Gass, has been around for quite a few years. The movie gives us slacker rockers KG and JB as they work together to both try to put together the World's Greatest Band while at the same time hunting down the prophetic "Pick of Destiny," a green pick that supposedly brought fame and glory to past rock gods. Along the way, the boys contend with Satan, Sasquatch, and a number of other hilarious characters played by the likes of Ben Stiller and Tim Robbins. (JT)

Turistas

Not Yet Reviewed (R)

Another horror film for the kids. This one, directed by *Blue Crush* and *Crazy/Beautiful* director John Stockwell, gives us a gaggle of sexy, no-name actors who somehow find themselves marooned in the middle of the Brazilian jungle whilst away on vacation. Things get nutty, torture ensues, everything turns green

FILM

ART FILM OF THE WEEK BY AARON SHELEY *FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS*



Perhaps the most iconic image of Terry Gilliam's immortal *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

For cult status alone, Terry Gilliam's faithful adaptation of Hunter S. Thompson's book of the same title earns its artistic license on the grounds that all standard film technique throughout the picture is disrupted to an extreme. On hyper drive, the non-stop drug-induced trip careens out of control well before the pair of drug fiends leave California on a journalistic assignment to Vegas.

The two protagonists are based on Hunter S. Thompson himself (here as his much-used nom de Plum Raoul Duke) and his lawyer, played respectively—in their finest methodical performances—by Johnny Depp and Benicio Del Toro. Ripped and twisted, they stumble through Gilliam's carnivalesque fantasyland of decadent existence, of life on the fatalistic edge. The subjective experience of the galaxy of drugs consumed throughout produce a tornado of surreal and frequently avant-garde expressionism.

The city of Las Vegas, NV becomes Gilliam's playground of experimentation, as it had been for Thompson and his "attorney," Brown Power renegade Oscar Zeta Acosta (named in the film and book as Dr. Gonzo). Drugs in the film blur the line between fantasy and reality, thus causing paranoia and fear to creep up on the duo that are lost in the maze of the city's blaring neon lights. The dialogue and narration voice-over is fast and punchy, uncanny in comparison to Thompson's Gonzo journalism cadences. Any opportunity to overdo various drugs

cause hallucinations such as: an orgy of lizard people, morphing faces, and a six-breasted demon...to name a few.

Gilliam holds nothing back in what is the best of modern-day drug culture films. The actors, Johnny Depp particularly, worked ardently in their roles to produce a film that is surreal...but also equally accurate in its depiction of real-life people during a time in American history (the early 1970's) that many still remember rather vividly. Depp, in fact, stayed with Thompson at his Colorado compound for weeks to ingest the Good Doctor's movements and mannerisms, exemplified marvelously by Depp in the film.

The ultimate delight of the film is that though he may be savage, morbid, and absolutely cutting-to-the-bone caustic, Duke is ultimately likable in his anarchist, live-for-the-moment characterization. The film rages as a wild-fire from drug trip to drug trip, never letting up for a breather except for a beautifully elegiac narration that runs throughout the film, lamenting over the dying light of the 1960's.

The concluding montage spins the world of the film into a reckless oblivion, with trashed hotel rooms and obscene belligerence in the wake. The two druggies make frothing beasts of themselves, and by the end of the film, it appears that they are both going to continue their ways of rampant abandon, blood-thirsty revolution, and absolute freedom. Two good, patriotic Americans. ☞

and blue, we get close-ups of teeth, etc. You know the drill by now. Michael Ross' first script—and he gives editors and assistant editors all over Hollywood something to hope for, now doesn't he? It could happen to *you!* (MK)

Unaccompanied Minors

Not Yet Reviewed (PG)

Another TV director tries his tremulous hands at a feature film, as Paul Feig attempts a rousing family film for the holidays with *Unaccompanied Minors*. Yawn. As though Chris Rock's younger self Tyler James Williams wasn't annoying enough (especially with that scrunched-face plastered all over the city on those damn CW posters...boy, is *this* kid gonna end up in a sticky situation later in life), now here he is as the token black kid (which would be OK, except for the fact that the very notion of a token black kid is *sooo* 1998) amongst a bunch of WASPy Kevin McAllister's (redundant

who are left stranded in an airport on Christmas Eve and absolutely *must* torment their adult supervisors Wilmer Valderrama (who I hear tell lost in a match of "Yo Momma's" with Williams, then later reportedly explained that star cherub Gina Montegna was "very loud during sex") and Lewis Black (straight outta shooting *Accepted 2: The Return Home*). If *Deck the Halls* or *The Santa Clause 3* is sold-out, give this one a looky...unless you're opposed to *poopie-caca*. (MK)

Van Wilder 2: The Rise of Taj

Not Yet Reviewed (R)

Kal "Picaninny" Penn reprises his role from the first (really more of a composite of that role and his Oscar-winning performance in *White Castle*) as an apostle of Van Wilder who will show you just how easy it is to waste Mom and Dad's money at school while not getting charged for date-rape. (MK) ☞

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ENTERTAINMENT INSIDERS

OBITUARY BY RUSTY WHITE

PERRY HENZELL
DIED NOV. 30, 2006

1970's and early 1980's, made a star out of reggae singer Jimmy Cliff.

The Harder They Come has an underlying power that cannily overcame its shoestring budget and low production values. The story is based on the real life exploits of Jamaican outlaw Ivanhoe Martin in a scathing look at the effects of poverty and despair on the human spirit.

Henzell's second film, *No Place Like Home*, began production in the 1970's. Production delays and the loss of the shot footage for nearly 30 years led to the film not seeing theaters until this year. The movie premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2006.

Mr. Henzell worked for the BBC during the 1950's. He was also a published author.

Jamaican filmmaker and novelist Perry Henzell died of cancer at age 70.

Mr. Henzell wrote, produced, and directed the cult classic *The Harder They Come*. The film was the first feature film to be produced in Jamaica. The 1972 film that, along with *El Topo* and *Pink Flamingos*, helped to ignite the "Midnight Movie" craze of the

WEEKLY SPORTS WRAP-UP BY JOSEPH TRINH



For the few, if any, of you out there who actually read this sports section, you might remember last week when I said that the debate for #2 in college football was basically between the USC Trojans and the Wolverines of Michigan. Once again, God has made the decision to make me the fool by not allowing neither to win the argument, but instead vaulting the Florida Gators onto a collision course with the #1 team in the nation, *the* Ohio St. Buckeyes. I swear to you, I'll get you back for that.

This came into fruition when then #2 USC faced UCLA. A team that was practically one loss away from firing their head coach, Karl Dorrell, the Bruins did the unthinkable by upsetting the Trojans, 13-9. After blazing through Oregon, Cal, and Notre Dame, all of whom were ranking at the time of each game, USC possibly were caught looking ahead to their potential third straight BCS title game. The unranked Bruins, who were coming of a bye, had an extra week to prepare for their hated rival, and prepared they were.

USC's offense, which was rolling late in the season, came to a dead halt in Pasadena. UCLA hounded quarterback John David Booty all day, not letting him set his feet to throw to his talented receivers. With the second loss of the season, the Trojans will be heading back to Pasadena to play in the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day, where they will be facing Michigan.

What the hell happened? Everyone was thinking that Michigan was too far ahead in the BCS poll to

be jumped by any of the other teams in the polls if USC lost to UCLA. I guess people underestimated the power of perception, as the belief that Florida played in the toughest conference in college football worked to their advantage after they beat Arkansas to win the SEC Conference Championship. With both LSU and Auburn making the BCS series, the faith in the SEC's superiority over the mere mortals that toil in the subpar clubs of the Pac-10's, Big Ten's, and Big 12's was rewarded with the Gators winning this PR campaign known as the BCS. The cries for a playoff format are becoming deafening across the land.

This leaves what some people consider as the real #2 and #3 teams in the nation to face one another in the Rose Bowl in what some pundits will call the Consolation Bowl on New Year's Day. In all reality, this is a classic matchup of traditional Rose Bowl attendees from the Pac-10 and Big Ten. With two of the best defenses in the nation facing off against two offenses that feature potentially several 1st Round picks in next year's NFL draft, this is going to be a monster matchup.

Motivation shouldn't be missing in this game as Michigan looks to prove the people wrong by not setting up a rematch with Ohio St., and USC looks to mount their national title campaign for next year with a big win over the Wolverines. As for that other BCS Bowl Game? I'll say Ohio St. will prove to everyone that they cannot be touch this year, which means Florida will win, but only if there is a God (I kid, I kid. You know I love You). ♪

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MON 08

Davison-Coleman (Alternative, Pop, World)

This indie-adult contemporary act has hints of soulful world sounds. BORDERS BOOKS & MUSIC – GLENDALE, 100 S. Brand Blvd., 818-241-8099 12/08/06: 8 p.m.



TUE 09

Hansel and Gretel (Opera)

The classic children's fairy tale comes to the operatic stage in a uniquely charming work. Alan Gilbert conducts a new production created by celebrated director, artist, and designer Douglas Fitch, featuring a newly commissioned English translation by Richard Sparks. Sent into the forest to gather strawberries, Hansel and Gretel lose track of time and place as darkness falls upon them. The next morning, an enchanted house made of gingerbread lures the children into an enticing trap, but last-minute ingenuity saves the day and the children are reunited with their parents. DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION, 135 N. Grand Ave., 213-972-7211, \$30-\$220 12/09/06: 2 p.m.



WED 10

Alexander Apostol: Selected Works, The (Museum, Photography)

This exhibition presents the recent photographs and video by Venezuelan artist Alexander Apóstol. The exhibition, curated by Bill Kelley, Jr., features two large-scale photographic series — 'Residente Pulido' and 'Residente Pulido Ranchos' — as well as new video work. LOS ANGELES CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS (LACE), 6522 Hollywood Blvd., 213-957-1777 12/10/06: 12 p.m. till 6 p.m.



THUR 11

Breaking the Mode: Contemporary Fashion From the Permanent Collection (Design, Museum)

The recent dynamic changes in the forms and surfaces of fashionable dress will be featured in this comprehensive exhibition, which will include over 100 examples of contemporary dress drawn exclusively from LACMA's collection. LACMA, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., 323-857-6000 12/11/06: 12 a.m. till 8 p.m.



FRI 12

Emma Burgess (Folk, Live Music in Bar/Club, Rock)

Holly Palmer released her eponymous debut in 1996, garnering critical support with songs like 'Scandinavian Ladies,' 'Come Lie With Me' and 'Lickerish Man.' After contributing to the soundtrack for 'Down With Love,' Palmer released 'I Confess' in 2003. HOTEL CAFÉ, 1623 1/2 N. Cahuenga Blvd., 323-461-2040, \$3 12/12/06: 8 p.m.



SAT 13

Andy Dick (Stand Up Comedy)

Andy Dick became a star on MTV's 'The Andy Dick Show' specializing in outrageous and rude humor helped along by his own madcap personality. He has played character roles in many films, including 'Reality Bites' with Janeane Garofalo, 'The Cable Guy' with Jim Carrey, 'Inspector Gadget' in 1999 with Matthew Broderick, 'Road Trip' and most recently 'Employee of the Month' with Jessica Simpson. VINE STREET LOUNGE, 1708 Vine St., 323-493-3988, \$12 12/13/06: 8:30 p.m.



SUN 14

Death of a Salesman (Drama, Performance)

This story presents the final days of a failing salesman, who seeks to find out, by a tragic series of soul-searching revelations of the past life he has lived with his wife, his sons and his business associates, just where and how he has failed to win success and happiness. 'Death of a Salesman' is a thrilling work of deep and revealing beauty. ODYSSEY THEATRE, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., 310-477-2055, \$22-\$26 12/14/06: 8 p.m.

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MON 15

Brian Setzer Orchestra Christmas Extravaganza (Holiday (Pop/Jazz), Rock, Swing, Holiday) The Brian Setzer Orchestra, a true 18-piece Big Band lineup is fronted by Setzer and his electric guitar, will present a Christmas show. GIBSON AMPHITHEATRE AT UNIVERSAL CITYWALK, 100 Universal City Plaza, 818-622-4440, \$37.50-\$70 12/15/06: 8:15 p.m.



TUE 16

Dane Cook's Tourgasm Comedy Tour, Gary Gulman and Jay Davis (Stand Up Comedy) See the hilarious comics from the HBO hit series, 'Tourgasm' live on stage. The tour features comedians Robert Kelly, Gary Gulman and Jay Davis. Dane Cook will not be appearing at these shows. WILTERN THEATRE, 3790 Wilshire Blvd., 213-380-5005, \$36.50 12/16/06: 8 p.m.



WED 17

David Allan Coe (Country, Live Music in Bar / Club) Despite his outsider status in the country music industry, David Allan Coe has gained a hardcore following, and many of his songs — including 'Take This Job and Shove It' — have been hits for other performers. KEY CLUB - WEST HOLLYWOOD, 9039 Sunset Blvd., 310-274-5800, \$25 12/17/06: 8 p.m.



THUR 18

Descanso Gardens Holiday Festival (Holiday, Nature) Enjoy the winter landscape. Find one-of-a-kind gifts at the classy new Marketplace at the Boddy House and at Descanso's Gift Shop. Bring the family for festive special events they'll never forget. Enjoy holiday food and music, rides on the Enchanted Railroad and free trips on the tram to the Marketplace. And be sure to chat (and pose) with Santa, who will spend nine days of quality time here before he really gets busy. DESCANSO GARDENS, 1418 Descanso Dr., 818-949-4200 12/18/06: 9 a.m. till 5 p.m.



FRI 19

Disney's The Lion King: National Tour (Musical) This acclaimed production is based on the animated Disney movie, but is quite different from the film. From the startling opening, featuring life-sized animal representations taking over the stage to pay tribute to Mufasa, the lion king, this is a unique theatrical experience that tries to make a statement about the cycle of life and death in the wilderness. PANTAGES THEATRE - HOLLYWOOD, 6233 Hollywood Blvd., 323-468-1770, \$17.50-\$127 12/19/06: 8 p.m.



SAT 20

Orphans of the Rwanda Genocide (Gallery, Museum, Photography) This important photo exhibition focuses on haunting first person testimonies and insightful images of human tragedy and survival in Rwanda. Powerful photographs taken by Jerry Berndt portray genocide memorial sites—lye-covered bones and tattered clothing contrasted with hopeful images of the orphans of Rwanda rebuilding their lives through marriages, birth, and healing. MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART, 4005 S. Crenshaw Blvd., 323-294-7071 12/20/06: 10 till 4 p.m.



SUN 21

Disney On Ice: A Disneyland Adventure (Children, General, Ice Skating) Join hosts Mickey and Minnie as they take audiences through non-stop fun as Disney On Ice presents 'A Disneyland Adventure.' Swing through the Jungle Cruise with Baloo, fly through Space Mountain with Buzz Lightyear and spin in the tea cups with Alice and Mad Hatter! See many favorites, including the Disney Princesses Snow White and Cinderella, during the Main Street USA parade. STAPLES CENTER, 1111 S. Figueroa St., 213-624-3100, \$15-\$60 12/21/06: 7:30 p.m.

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THIS WEEK'S BIRTHDAYS:

Facts, figures, and info appear to dominate this week. "Too much honesty" may become an issue. "Zip the lip" is my advice! Social mixers with power people will go well on Saturday, but will fall flat on Sunday, so *cocoon* with family.

Aries (March 20 to April 19)

Aries Betty Davis said, "What a dump!" and this week, you will have the same take on clutter. Crappy cooperation litters the end of the week with a mess of another kind. Excellent "authority karma" on Saturday makes up for it.

Taurus (April 20 to May 19)

16 Tons of work may go into the minutia of life early this week. "Excess" is the word of the day in the middle of the week, while—unless you monitor your "image" and remain cheerfully "outside yourself"—"Me, My-selfish, and I" may claim the better of you toward the end of this week.

Gemini (May 21 to June 20)

Picky, picky! Dispose of the worry/insecurity early in the week and get on with it! Sound decisions mark the middle of the week, while a sarcastic tongue can bite into Friday if you don't avoid it. Emotional calm needs to be projected later in the week, especially with lovers or around "Mr. Big."

Cancer (June 21 to July 20)

This will be "low-profile" week for you. Don't draw attention to yourself or volunteer! Keep your word/schedule on Monday, your butt moving on Tuesday, and a cheerful face on the Wednesday.

Leo (July 21 to August 20)

Do *not* force an issue near Tuesday or Wednesday, especially with Sag, Virgo, Cancer, Cap, Scorpio, or other Lions. Hit up "big time favors" from others later in the week, and "schmooze" with authority figures/power people.

Virgo (August 21 to September 20)

A deluge of details will dominate you on Monday and Tuesday, but your mind will be less badgered thereafter. Be adaptable later in the week, and avoid crass comments. Also reveal "few emotions."

Libra (September 21 to October 22)

Get as much done early in the week as you can, since you may "have your hands full" by the end of the week. A "worn attitude" is possible. Your "cheerful quota" is back up by next week, but emotions may quell. Do "your own thing."

Scorpio (October 23 to November 21)

Take one thing at a time on Monday, no demands on Tuesday, channel your nervous energy constructively on Wednesday, and then mind your own business, talk to industry insiders for profit, deal with authority figures well, and finally *hide*!

Sagittarius (November 22 to December 21)

Your word/image may be critical on Monday and Tuesday; shine true. Maintain "balance" between work/play on Wednesday. Socialize *up the wazoo* later in the week, and then withdraw to "prepare" for upcoming needs.

Capricorn (December 22 to January 20)

Your whole week may be a preparation for the end of the week and its "huge opportunities," even if nothing seems "planned." Be high-profile and sidle up to power people. Remember: in order to make it "all about you," think "it's all about *them*."

Aquarius (January 21 to February 18)

A bad case of *distraction* may claim Monday and Tuesday; focus. Unless you wrangle your emotions, being the cheerful problem-solver later in the week could end in some "sour grapes." Be a social butterfly on Friday, but not on Saturday.

Pisces (February 19 to March 19)

Fatigue may claim the early week, while emotions may consume you later on. Avoid promising away too much of your time, energy, money, and psyche, even to family/lovers. A well-balanced week will give you more!

Contact Rita Ann for personal service at: www.VoiceOfAstrology.com

COMICS

Walker and Prescott.com by Drew-Michael



Skinny Panda by Phil Cho



The latest breakthrough in pediatric medicine may not have much to do with science at all.

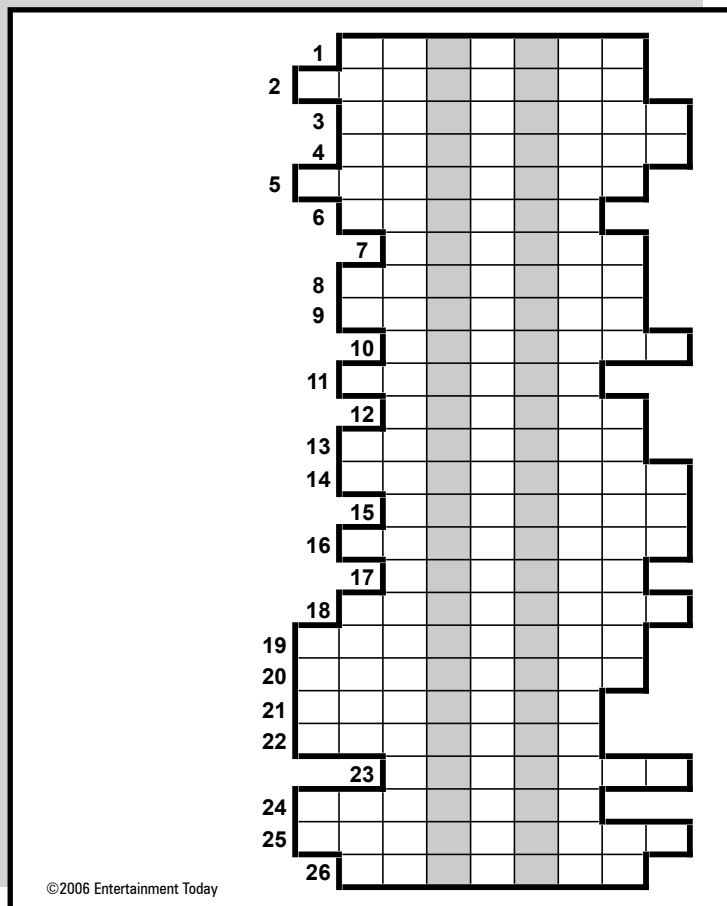
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POPGRIDDLE CROSSWORD PUZZLE



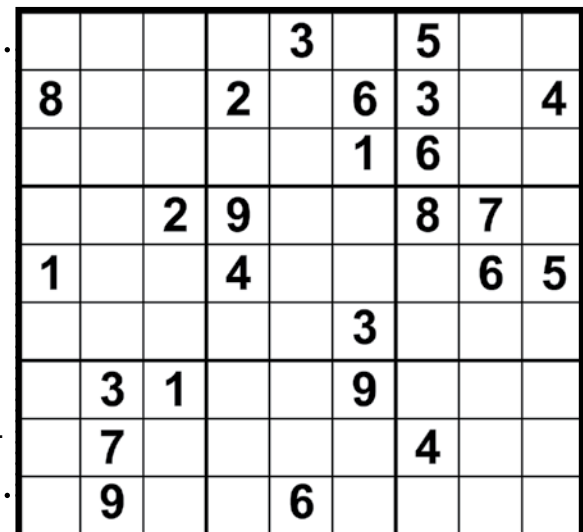
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SUDOKU

The ultimate logic puzzle

The object of the game is to fill in the blank cells with the numbers 1 to 9 such that:

- 1) Every row should have the numbers 1 - 9 (in any order).
- 2) Every column should have the numbers 1 - 9 (in any order).
- 3) Every 3x3 bolded square should have 1 - 9 (in any order).



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Answers to last weeks puzzle:

3	8	4	9	6	1	5	7	2
2	7	9	3	5	8	4	6	1
5	6	1	4	7	2	9	8	3
9	3	5	7	8	4	1	2	6
1	4	8	2	3	6	7	5	9
7	2	6	5	1	9	3	4	8
8	5	7	1	2	3	6	9	4
6	9	3	8	4	5	2	1	7
4	1	2	6	9	7	8	3	5

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Find the answers to read a quote from *V for Vendetta* on the gray columns.
Created by G. Gillen

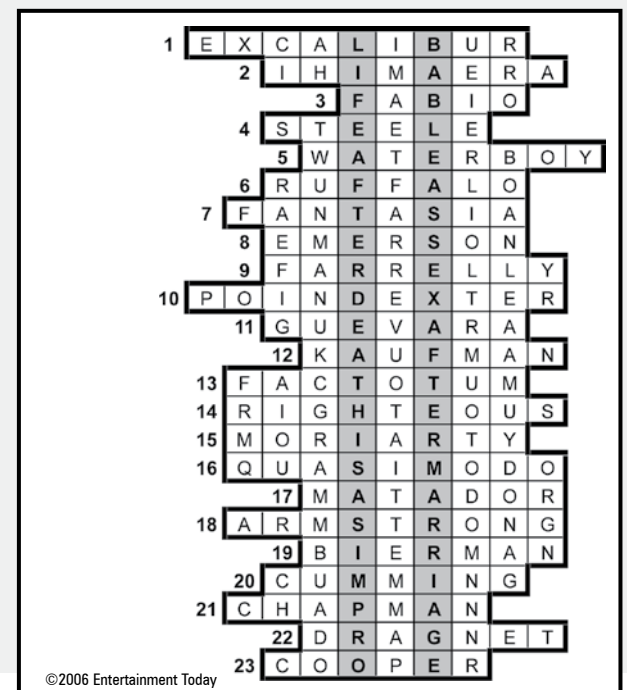
1. Paul Michael Glaser's streetwise detective in the 1970's TV show; known for driving the "Striped Tomato" (his red Ford Torino), alongside partner Ken Hutchinson (David Soul)
2. 1994 film, an interstellar teleportation device is found in Egypt, leading to a planet inhabited by humans who worship the god Ra; with Kurt Russell and James Spader
3. German actress, after her successful performance in 1929's *The Blue Angel*, she went to Hollywood to make *Morocco*, for which she received an Academy Award nomination
4. Actor, landed his first film role in Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991); his most important role to date is as Jesus Christ in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*
5. Hard rock band formed in California in 2002 by three former members of Guns N' Roses, plus Scott Weiland and Dave Kushner; Velvet _____
6. English writer, author of *The Compleat Angler*; (1593-1683)
7. British actress, began her acting career in theatre, made her screen debut in *Aria* (1987), also starred in *Bedazzled* and *Serving Sara*
8. Illustrated book by Chris Van Allsburg about two young brothers who discover a space-themed board game where everything inside it becomes real; adapted into a film in 2005
9. 2004 biographical film that depicts the early years of Howard Hughes' career; directed by Martin Scorsese, with Leonardo DiCaprio
10. World-famous Spanish operatic tenor; participated with Jose Carreras and Luciano Pavarotti in the Three Tenors concerts
11. Ewan McGregor's character in 1996's *Trainspotting*
12. 2004 film, with Don Cheadle, the true story of a hotel manager who housed over a thousand Tutsis refugees during their struggle against the Hutu militia in 1994; *Hotel* _____
13. Popular sitcom created by Marta Kauffman and David Crane, about a group of six twenty-somethings living in Greenwich Village, New York; ran from 1994 to 2004 on NBC
14. Desert planet in a binary star system, home of the Skywalker family
15. Poet, essayist, and journalist, proclaimed "the greatest of all American poets", his works have been translated into more than 25 languages (1819-1892)
16. Actress, four times nominated for Academy Awards, won for her leading role in 1957's *The Three Faces of Eve*
17. City in Illinois from where Wayne Campbell and his sidekick Garth Algar host their local cable access TV program *Wayne's World*
18. Actress, won attention as the sex-starved coach in 1981's *Porky's*, but probably best remembered for her role in 1987's romantic comedy *Mannequin*
19. 1987 film, an invisible alien hunter stalks a Commando unit in a Central America jungle, with Arnold Schwarzenegger
20. Actor born in Germany; Hobbit Meriadoc Brandybuck in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, also stars in ABC's drama *Lost*
21. Stage and screen actor, typically cast in supporting roles such as Sylvester Stallone's cop nemesis in 1982's *First Blood*, also as a benevolent alien in 1985's *Cocoon*
22. Stage name of Marcel Mangel, a well known mime who had the only speaking part in Mel Brooks' *Silent Movie* (1976)
23. Rock band fronted by Kurt Cobain
24. Popular comic strip created by Chic Young, it has been published in more than 2300 newspapers in 55 countries since 1930, and translated into 35 languages
25. 2002 film with Kevin Costner, a grieving doctor is contacted by his late wife through his patients near death experiences
26. Character in 1947's *Miracle on 34th Street*, a man who claims to be Santa Claus; interpreted by Edmund Gwenn who won an Academy Award for his performance

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