



Boys on the Side'

Another on the road movie you might scream. Well, this little gem is a totally camp Thelma and Louise that I'm sure will have you rolling in your popcorn, when you are not having your tear ducts jerked.

Whoopi Goldberg is excellent as Jane, a lesbian singer who shares a car journey first with Robin (Louise Parker) and then wild kid Holly (Drew Barrymore). Holly, as you might expect goes from one scrape to the next, having

escaped from a mad boyfriend, only to find him turn up murdered on the front pages and the police hot on her tail. Aside from the laughs there is plenty of chances to sob, especially when Robin gets an AIDS-related illness.

Even the music is good. The soundtrack stays with feminist issues and includes Sheryl Crow, the Indigo Girls and Joan Armatrading, just to give you an idea.

This movie manages to pull out all the stops without turning into mush. Definitely one not to be missed.

Exotica

As you might of guessed, this film is about sex. It revolves around a complicated mesh of relationships amongst the staff and the clients of a strip joint called, you guessed it, Exotica.

Everyone in the movie has something to hide from table dancer Christina (Mia Kirshner) to Thomas (Don McKellar) a gay pet-shop owner. Typical of an Egoyan movie it is more a psychological jigsaw than any great tale.

It may be billed a study in voyeurism, but in essence it is a great excuse to show lots of girlies wearing very little and to label it art. If you are looking for a few thrills of the fleshy variety with a bit of

exploitation thrown in for good measure then this is definitely your kind of movie.



Legends of the Fall

This movie definitely has a star cast with Anthony Hopkins, Bradd Pitt and Aidan Quinn all turning up to take a bow.

It is a family saga on an epic scale. Set around the time of World War 1 it is the story of three sons raised in Montana under a disciplinary father (Anthony Hopkins). Eldest brother Alfred (Aidan Quinn) is extremely respectful of his father's wishes, Tristan (Bradd Pitt) as you'd expect plays the wild one. Trouble starts when Samuel (Henry

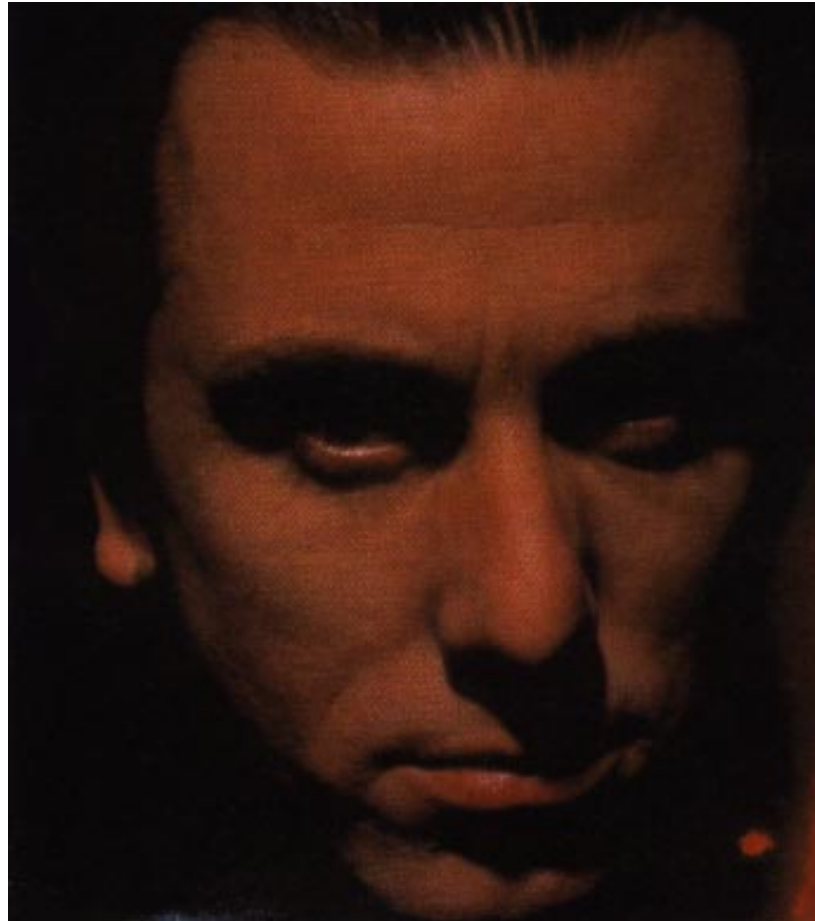


Thomas) returns back to the family homestead with pretty wife Susannah (Julia Ormond) in tow. Bradd Pitt fans will love the movie, it shows him in every conceivable role from cowboy to soldier as he travels around wrestling bears and sailing on the high seas. If Pitt and his fab body doesn't turn you on then you might want to save your pennies on this one.

Little Odessa

Tim Roth plays Joshua, a freelance hitman who can't go into Odessa, the Russian-Jewish neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York for two reasons - he hates his tyrannical father and a guy called Volko is after his blood. An assignment to knock off a jeweller, however, forces him to return to his childhood haunt and he is soon recognised by an old gang member. His stay turns out to be not as brief as he first planned thanks to his baby brother Reuben (Edward Furlong), his dying mother (Vanessa Redgrave) and of course a bit of local crummet down the corner store called Alla (Mira Kelly). Writer/director James Gray's debut feature is a grey and depressing look into gangster communities. If you are looking for glamour then forget it. This is the land

where boys definitely don't cry. There are touching moments, however, such as where Roth holds his dying mother. This is a good first movie and well worth taking a look at, but only if you are feeling in an optimistic mood!





Pinball

This month we bring you a new, never before covered review section. To stimulate your mind. Pinball, no tilting please.

Ha! I live with danger in the amusement arcades of London. A gang of teenagers in stupid trousers are attempting to cheat the Cromptons Penny Waterfall machine a few yards to my left, or it could just be they're as annoyed as me by the way it keeps playing the 'Match of the Day' theme. The alarms go off and security appears, with a face that reads "£3.20 an hour and all the drugs I can confiscate. Is it worth it?" Trapping the ball on the right flipper of 'The Shadow', I hear breaking glass and see the very petty criminals legging it. Someone turns up bearing a dustpan and brush and a resigned look you'd expect to see on the face of Mrs.

Oliver Reed. I finally line up that crucial ramp shot.11



misses. Some things never change.

But pinball has. Leave the simple pleasures of battering a couple of balls with an electro-mechanical paddle to the L.A.P.D., these days pinball is firmly in the hi-tech camp. Games use electronics to provide features initiated by the player, and dot matrix scoreboards provide information, animation and even video games within a game.

Sometimes it gets silly. Changing gear while using both hands to play the car chase game "Getaway" is somewhat tricky, and not even Mel Gibson has the three hands needed for the shootout feature in 'Lethal Weapon'. But even video games produce pin spinoffs, and the fashion for film tie-ins means that players can suss the entire plot of the latest blockbuster months before its arrival on screen, for unlike movies pin tables receive a simultaneous US/UK release. Here's a roundup of what's new and current in a bar near you.

THEATRE OF MAGIC (Bally)

Reminiscent of the ever popular "Addams Family", this must be the





first pin to offer a computer simulation on its backboard as a regular feature. Based vaguely on reaching levels as a sorcerer through collecting features I never got past "journyman", not least due to the unerring tendency of every ball hit around the 'Magicians Trunk' to head straight down the middle. So I never found out if the top level means Claudia Schiffer or Debbie McGee. Still where else can you play features like 'Hat Magic' and "Levitating Woman". Potentially a winner.

DIRTY HARRY (Williams)

A mere twenty years after the last decent Callahan film comes the table, and yep, its dated, slow but most enjoyable. Big Clint's best lines sound fantastically camp, and there's a lot of empty space in the centre. But the feature starting HQ shot is suitably impossible and there's a plastic ACME warehouse to aim at too. However the "top loading reproduction .44 Magnum" wouldn't convince a five year old, and the jackpot shot is so



steep the flipper will doubtless be worn out by the time this reaches your local. Beware.

BAYWATCH (Sega)

Ignore the game, a fun but run of the mill collection of ramps with an excellent multiball and revel in its historical significance as possibly the first game in history where the babes featured on the artwork are also available in three dimensional form. It's all a bit wholesome for the real Venice Beach, home of exhibitionist crazies, (the worst type).

MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN (Data East)

This one has been out a while, but a lunatic 6 ball multi livens up this not especially challenging, or even entertaining film tie-in. However, dot matrix graphics reach new levels of authentic horror as Kenny Branagh appears on the screen. John Cleese gets his first ever mention on a pinball too.

Stephen Jelbert co-edits 'The Pinball Report'. For more details write to P.O. Box 2427, London N4



Theatre

Mike Bracken Starts to review *Our Boys* at the Donmar Theatre in London but gets slightly side-tracked on the "Theatre experience"

Many successful plays, films and TV series have originated from ideas that, at first, appear singularly unappealing. A middle aged man sitting in a hospital bed with a disfiguring skin disease was the main gist of *The Singing Detective*, and *Medea* is hardly the cheeriest of storylines. Even an evening with Gary Lineker became, well, you know.

Jonathan Lewis' play has similarly inauspicious plot: six injured soldiers waiting to leave a military hospital. However, the opening hour of *Our Boys* produces more laughs than all the editions of *Only When I Laugh* put together.

As the riotous humour is interspersed with the darker side of the men's mental and physical injuries, the mood of the play turns to bitter-sweet irony before the inevitably powerful denouement.

The underlying aspect, that of post-traumatic stress disorder, is exposed so well that one member of our audience who had been laughing heartily half an hour previously, was shaken and upset moments after the play ceased.

This should not detract from the humour inherent in the play. The forces camaraderie and laddishness are mimicked perfectly, and the delivery of quick fire gags is reminiscent of the Marx Brothers. One particular scene, in which the characters play a drinking game called *Beer Hunter* whilst re-enacting dialogue from various war films, will no doubt be emulated by students and soldiers everywhere. But the wider story of *Our Boys* unfortunately falls into that old chestnut: what is wrong with British theatre?

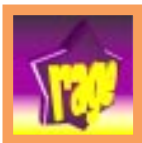
Our Boys is media for the masses, a theatrical attempt at *Boys from the Blackstuff*, and as such deserves a populist audience. Invariably, backstage at every play there is an ageing thespian, replete with booming voice, exhorting any one who will listen that the play deserves to be a success

because the performances were wonderful/the audience loved it/it performs better on a large stage et cetera ad bloody nauseum. As night follows day, our ageing thespian's semi drunken whine will be followed a beery discussion that begins, you guessed it, ...that's the problem with theatre in Britain, you see.

As a Joe Bloke sort of character, my introduction to British theatre in the last 18 months or so has left me amazed by the pomposity, vanity and self-righteousness of much of the theatrical community. If only for the sake of *Our Boys*, with its popular culture references ranging from *Apocalypse Now* to *Everton FC*, it is high time that this self-deluding tosh should be countered.

What is wrong with the British theatre, and especially the metropolitan mafia, is that it expects plays to be well attended and successful only because the actors are friends or the performances are good. This obscures the point that the play itself is often abstract, intellectual hogwash that only the parochial world of theatre insiders will appreciate, despite the quality of the performances.

Where British theatre continually falls down is by exposing its schismatic class and intellectual conviction.





tions on its audience. Lloyd Webber, Grease and the few other populist performances are deemed worthy of satisfying the proles, whilst the theatrical highbrows are catered for by the RSC and elongated productions of dull but worthy plays.

Although the theatrical community is waking up to the idea that there is a huge untapped audience just waiting for mainstream theatre to be made more accessible, there is little idea of how to go about attracting them. Indeed, the situation is only exacerbated by theatre companies argument that new playwrights are not coming up with challenging material. As David Lodge eloquently pointed out, new playwrights are attempting to mimic past successes because that is what theatre companies are demanding. This chicken and egg scenario exists primarily because little thought has been put into the comprehensive marketing and promoting of popular and original plays as a sector, instead one lucky one in twenty scrambles to the top and actually makes a profit.

Cross-media advertising has worked previously. Television has no qualms in promoting productions as diverse as Neighbours and Prime Suspect whilst seeking mass

audiences for both. Films, even British ones, manage to sell themselves on the flimsiest of pretences, but the theatre remains disorganised and characterised by infighting.

Prices have always been a sore subject in British theatre, as subsidies have fallen while the cost of staging a production have risen. There is, in effect, a cartel being operated by the big theatres, which results in smaller London and other regional productions operating at a loss in the hope that the money spent will be regained when the production moves to the West End. For the lucky ones, such as *An Evening with Gary Lineker*, *An Absence of War* and *Oleanna* all well and good, but this is no way to run a business, let alone an industry, as it only leads to increased elitism and uncoordinated attempts to attract mass audiences.

Listening to the cast of *Our Boys* after the play, it quickly became apparent that they were acutely aware that the success of the play depended on a West End theatre running, funding and marketing it. Someone even suggested inviting Gary Bushell as an attempt to promote it in the tabloid media.

That actors recognise that there is no promotional and marketing out-

let for plays looking to attract mass audiences, highlights how desperate the problem has become. In all probability, the show may well go regional again before folding. Lloyd Owen, the lead part, will return to filming *The Young Indiana Jones* with George Lucas. The other talented actors will continue to look for parts in fringe and regional productions, hoping that the next one will be transferred to the West End. Jonathan Lewis will have had the pleasure of seeing his semi-autobiographical work enacted, whilst promoter Rupert Gavin will have embellished his philanthropic theatrical record if not his bank balance.

And yet another impressive, powerful and rewarding play will have gone to the dogs for want of decent promotion and advertising. With VE day celebrations fresh in the memory, a tale concerning the effects of stress on soldiers will probably never be more topical in this country, yet traditional reviewers prefer to talk up plays at the larger venues, despite the fact that lately they include two recasts (*Arcadia* and *Design for Living*) and yet another Arthur Miller play. This, as one well oiled hack advised me at the National last year, has always been the way. And that, as I should have replied, is what is wrong with British theatre today.



Books

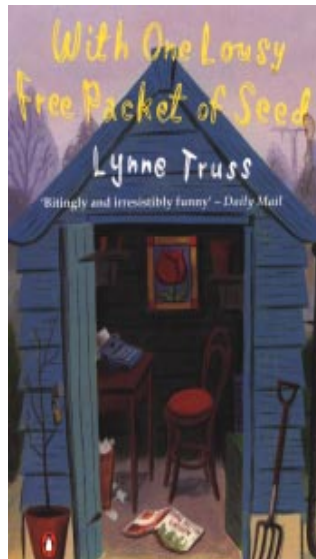
Once again Rebecca Blaber casts an eye of the new book releases.

With One Lousy Free Packet of Seed - Lynne Truss. Penguin, £5.99

Bitingly and irresistibly funny screams the front cover. If so, I failed to get the joke. I found instead a mundane and poorly observed novel full of not-very-funny jokes and characterization that would be better suited to a short in a women's weekly than a full-blown novel. The basic plot concerns a gardening journalist who writes his *Me and My Shed* column based on interviews with sub-minor league celebrities, and an office full of social incompetents who eat (drink?) Cup-a-soup and wear fluffy slippers. They also send post-its to themselves, depress the reader immeasurably and mention gardening every

once in a while. Sadly, their magazine is being taken over by more dynamic management. It is very difficult to care.

Of course, I am being unfair, for the back cover informs me that This book will become a perennial comic delight. I certainly hope not, for that would be a sad reflection on the state of British comic writing. This book is out there, blazoning its cheerful reviews on all sides. You have been warned.



The Pugilist at Rest Thom Jones, Faber&Faber, £5.99

This debut collection by Thom Jones promises the start of a formidable, potentially dazzling literary talent. Here is a collection of short stories, written with a fierce and uncompromising voice. Whether presenting a classic, full-on first person narrative, or a gentler, more distanced delivery, Jones achieves a fascinating and innovative mixture of philosophy, violence and heartbreak.

The *Pugilist at Rest* is a collection of eleven stories subdivided into four parts. The first part, containing

the title piece, is narrated by a violent but lyrical American Marine recruit. He recounts anecdotes from the dehumanising process of becoming that special kind of soldier with a bewildered and ferocious voice. He puzzles at other men's behaviour; he despairs of himself and mistrusts his basic instincts for survival.

But this might be misleading. Far from chronicling military life, this opening story is an glimpse in to the heart and an underplayed tour de force of narration. This story holds more than a passing reference to Schopenhauer, Edith Piaf, the Beat Poets and Vietnam. Our narrator picks his way through the minds of others with the ruthlessness of a natural born story-teller. He is determinedly loyal, vicious, screwed up and, at the close of the story, patiently awaiting a lloot-omy in a bleak and fragmented ending that lingers in the mind. Later in the collection come a pair of stories, *Silhouettes* and *I want to Live!*, that reveal a much more rounded and empathetic narratorial voice. *Silhouettes* recounts the bleak and heart shattering tale of a boy named Window, a graduate of a high-school Special Ed programme who makes it as a janitor but whose life is a proverbial pit of despair as a result of his unrequited love. A wonderfully eclectic and eccentric cast of extras start to



appear; the pseudo-philosophical Meldrick, boss of the laundry room and king of the mac-robiotic diet, the girl of his dreams, the disgustingly unpleasant Catherine. Likewise, a satisfying array of symbols appear; the Citroen that looks like a spaceship but ultimately brings a kind of redemption for Window, and a cuckolding brother who provides Catherine with an unwanted child that our downbeat hero is obliged to support. A truly terrifying encounter with the underbelly of the American Dream. I Want to Live presents a woman dying from cancer and provides a convincing account of quite stupefying fears between rounds of Morphine and Dilaudid. A bleak prospect, but somehow an uplifting read as the protagonist reminds us of the satisfying minutiae of life and the ordinariness of death. As a dying woman she is at liberty to shock. She had no idea anything could be so horrible. Starving in Bangladesh? No problem - I'll trade. This is in fact a funny, overwhelmingly human piece of writing, much like the rest of the stories in this formidable collection. This collection deserves at the very least a read. More optimistically it deserves serious recognition as an important new literary discovery.



Here comes John
Bridget O'Connor
Picador £5.99

Ms O Connor is a former Time Out London Writing Competition winner, and this anthology is her first solo collection. In short, the stories are a witty, rapacious and incisively naughty selection of tales. Combining the grit and the grime of urban living with the sharp-thinking hedonism of the female mind, O Connor has produced pared down, zesty stories in which young urban women tell it like it is. The narrators are pushy, tough, exploitative and independent, but

they are joyously witty and splendid in their tactics. In *Kissing Time*, a short piece by a 25 year old woman about to lose her teeth, we find a confused and panic-struck narrator who decided to seduce a workman right off the street in an attempt to gain a last, pitiful snog. O Connors prose is graphic and honest to the point of nausea ...teeth like a set from a dolphin. Smoked, his tongue like an emery board under water, the gaps in his teeth sedimented and sour, he could do it for hours. *Bones* relates the pitiful tale of Euan and Simone who suffer the varied tribulations of an unwanted marriage(Euan) and a four pound ovarian cyst (Think of it like a giant moth husk (Simone)). In what could be, potentially, a bleak and uncomfortable tale we find, somehow, that the nature of the prose is downright funny. It's black humour of the highest order, but humour nonetheless. *Here Comes John*, the title story, is a satirical, bitingly honest stripping bare of modern man and his ham-fisted attempts at romance, courtship, call it what you will. I imagine that for men this would be a wonderfully uncomfortable read, but certainly an eye-opener. A perfect paperback for delving in to when there's little time to spare and you fancy a wicked, anarchistic laugh.



Poetry

Jem Rolls hits the poetry street looking for some hard hitting action.

Slam poetry hit big time with last year's ground breaking Nuyorican Tour. The London slams at the ICA and the Tabernacle, left no doubt as to the strength of the slam as poetry entertainment. The full-on press attention, packed seats, and the characteristic slice of competitive acrimony and even more characteristic quality poetry made sure of that.

A slam is poets competing against each other for votes from judges and the audience, with each poet getting a quick four minutes in which to please (so no long sonnets here), for cash prizes. For audiences, slams can be poetry at its most electric and immediate. With the poets giving it their best shot, and at four minutes there's no time to get dull, everyone is positively bursting to get their stuff over, it makes for riveting surprising ever-changing entertainment.

This month the Nuyoricans are back with a bigger and better bill to hotwire the scene

all over again. With the sensual lyrical Nuyorican founder Miguel Algarin, Nike ad rapper Reg E Gaines, the Nuyorican MC Bob ringmaster of the spoken word Holman, fresh young street-tough Samantha Coerbell, and with the mind-blowingly excellent Tracie Morris who's hip-hop rapping so gobsmacked audiences last year. The Nuyoricans are everything you grew up to think poetry wasn't. Hard, real and aural they take you, not over landscapes into the inner mind, but into the clenched space between the NY tenement blocks. Catch it while you can.

From that seminal 94 tour the slams have spread to Manchester, Bristol, Reading, and Edinburgh. But even before the arrival of the Nuyoricans slamming poets Farrago were already into slamming at Chat's Palace in London's down-at-heel Homerton. The slamming may not have been quite so fast and action packed as the Nuyoricans (teams of three with fifteen minute slots flowing in and out of each other), but that hasn't stopped the Farrago slammers from winning slams in San Francisco and Austin, Texas.

I saw one cooking slam at the Brewhouse in Bristol on April 4. Fifteen poets in five heats of three in a packed, word-thirsty room. The event was everything slams are designed to be: the noisy enthusiasm of the audience giving an electric energy to the mind-boggling diversity of poets. The slam was eventually won by the completely un-showbiz John Kandinsky, who wove and worded his way through with sheer earthy literary quality, which meant one kicking night was had by all. (for info. ring 0117 9412104).

The slams certainly have their downs as well as their ups. The chief problem is the voting. Judging panels annoy everyone with their subjective taste and bias. A show of hands can, especially among a small audience be fixed by the inclusion of a few good friends secreted in the audience. The truth is, as the Nuyoricans say, the best poet NEVER wins. Just because you've come nowhere, don't think you're lousy, and just because you've won, don't think you're the best.

The best solution to the judging problem I've seen was in Bristol: a decibel meter. It's a piece of pseudo-science perhaps, and reminds you of Hugh Green and





Opportunity knocks ,
but it puts pay to some of the com-
plaints about biased judges.

Further on the downside. Poetry-
wise, anything subtle has a harder
time getting through than say, the
comic party-pieces; long poems
are not permitted by the time limits;
poets very often feel abused by the
whole event; and lastly, should
poetry really be reduced to a
search for numbers from judges or
the shouts of the audience. But
what they do is create an edge, a
tense excitement, that poetry often
sorely lacks.

More, they can be a vital stage in
the development of a performance
poet. To move a poem from the pri-
vacy of the page to the full glare of
the public stage often involves con-
siderable reworking. They are very
different mediums and what works
in one does not necessarily work in
the other. Slam poetry forces poets
to confront the challenges of the
aural medium, to think in terms of
audience, of entertainment, and of
putting their best poems into
shape. The next step for a poet is
to write for the aural medium, to
free themselves of the finished
word, and learn the techniques and
freedoms of landing words
and meanings upon the ears
and eyes of the audience.

