

Live-in Maid

Live-in Maid (2004) D: Jorge Gaggero; with Norma Aleandro, Norma Argentina, Marcos Mundstocki, Claudia Lapacó. (NR, 83 min.) **Austin Film Society: More Than Buenos Aires – Film Renaissance in Argentina.** An economic crisis in Buenos Aires renews the relationship between a wealthy woman and her maid on its head. See www.austinfilm.org for more on the film. @Alamo Drafthouse South, Tuesday, 7pm; \$4, AFS members free.



out. But if you or your moviegoing companion are anywhere within whistling distance of adolescence, you'll howl at this lowbrow, family-friendly trifle. Aunt Viv (Curtis), an L.A. make-up maven, entrusts her spoiled, designer-clad Chihuahua, Chloe (voiced by Barrymore), to her niece Rachel (Perabo). The niece prefers dashing across the Mexican border for the weekend with her girlfriends to overseeing the dog's ritzy round of beauty treatments and spa appointments. Naturally, the prissy pooch gets lost, and naturally, a string of characters emerges to assist in Chloe's return, including Aunt Viv's studly landscaper, Sam (Manolo Cardona), and his Chihuahua, Papi (voiced by Lopez). The CG effects are fairly irresistible, as is the enormous canine cast. *Beverly Hills Chihuahua* is a silly, if guilty, pleasure. (10/10/2008) – Margaret Moser
★★ Movies 8

BOLT D: Byron Howard, Chris Williams; with John Travolta, Miley Cyrus, Susie Essman, Mark Walton, Malcolm McDowell, James Lipton. (PG, 96 min.)

Bolt, an animated German shepherd (voiced by Travolta), has been born and raised on a film studio lot and truly believes himself to possess those "radical canine enhancements" that his character displays every week on TV. Bolt is completely oblivious of his status as a flesh-and-blood nipper, so when he ends up accidentally shipped from his closed Hollywood environs to "the real world," aka New York City, the stage is set not only for a classic Disney road trip but also for a series of alternately comic and wistful revelations regarding the true nature of heroism, friendship, and love. The writing team of Dan Fogelman (Cars) and co-director Williams (Mulan) has concocted one of the most witty and often hilarious Disney outings in years. Add to that the beautifully nuanced vocal work from all involved, plus some of the most deliriously inspired animation to come out of Disney in years, and the end result is, to quote Rhino, *awesome*. (11/21/2008) – Marc Savlov
★★★★ Alamo Drafthouse Lake Creek, Barton Creek Square, CM Cedar Park, Hill Country Galleria, CM Round Rock, Southpark Meadows, Highland, Gateway, Lakeline, Metropolitan, Tinseltown North, Westgate

THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS D: Mark Herman; with Asa Butterfield, Jack Scanlon, David Thewlis, Vera Farmiga, Amber Beattie, Richard Johnson, Sheila Hancock, Rupert Friend. (PG-13, 93 min.)

Farmiga plays the wife of a German officer (Thewlis) during World War II who didn't realize until her husband's promotion to the rank of concentration camp commandant that the anti-Semitism and hatred that had been poisoning her country had started to metastasize into institutional mass murder. Watching her wake slowly to the most awful epiphany one could ever wake to is the greatest joy the film has to offer, and Farmiga's performance is a triumph of contradiction, fear, and incomprehension. However, the interac-

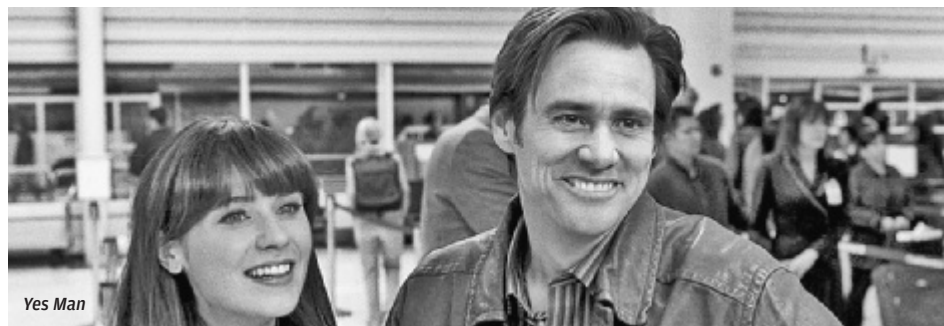
tions between the couple's son, Bruno (Butterfield), and the emaciated boy dying in the camp next door are guilty of the cardinal cinematic sins of forced adorability and emotional manipulation. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is safe filmmaking all the way, hinting at enough incomprehensible brutality to get hearts aching but unwilling to force audiences to actually stare that brutality in the face, lest sympathy give way to horror. (11/21/2008) – Josh Rosenblatt
★★★ Arbor, Tinseltown South

CADILLAC RECORDS D: Darnell Martin; with Adrien Brody, Jeffrey Wright, Gabrielle Union, Columbus Short, Cedric the Entertainer, Emmanuelle Chriqui, Eamonn Walker, Mos Def, Beyoncé Knowles, Eric Bogosian. (R, 108 min.)

Cadillac Records is a music portrait of the musicians, such as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter, Chuck Berry, and Etta James, who gravitated to postwar Chicago, and the Chess Records label, which recorded and promoted so much of their work. Although writer/director Martin's movie plays loose with many of the historical facts, her aim is dead-on in terms of nailing the spirit of the thing. *Cadillac Records* bobs and weaves, strides and duckwalks, samples and smiles on the sounds that made urban Chicago such a blues melting pot. It's best to not get too hung up on the purity of every single ingredient that goes into the pot, because that will only get in the way of the dish's overall taste, and *Cadillac Records* has flavor galore. The actors cast as the bluesmen and -women are spectacular – again, not so much for their physical mimicry but for their spiritual inhabitation of the historical figures. (12/12/2008) – Marjorie Baumgarten
★★★★ Tinseltown North

THE DARK KNIGHT D: Christopher Nolan; with Christian Bale, Heath Ledger, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Aaron Eckhart, Gary Oldman, Michael Caine, Morgan Freeman, Cillian Murphy, Eric Roberts, Monique Curnen, Chin Han. (PG-13, 152 min.)

Sacrifices must be made, because that's what heroes do. Or so goes the nihilistic logic behind *The Dark Knight*, a grim little parable on the wages of sin and the high cost of redemption. It's impossible to view Nolan's extravagantly dour film through anything but the prism of Ledger's death. His Joker is the sort of convoluted, densely layered characterization that gets nominated for awards come Oscar time. It's a pity, then, that when taken as a whole, this 2½-hour film is such a stuffy downer. It's jam-packed with flawlessly designed set-pieces and skulduggery, sure, but it's also shrouded in grim portent, overlaid with a filigree of despair, and, for good measure, covered in a patina of dire consequence. In short, it's a *Batman* for the new age of anxiety. There's something intangible missing from this *Dark Knight*. For all its thrum and thunder, Nolan's film feels chilly and ill at ease. (07/18/2008) – Marc Savlov
★★★ Movies 8



Yes Man

Love Actually

Love Actually (2003) D: Richard Curtis; with Hugh Grant, Emma Thompson, Alan Rickman, Bill Nighy, Liam Neeson, Colin Firth, Keira Knightley, Martine McCutcheon, Billy Bob Thornton, Joanna Page, Rowan Atkinson. (R, 135 min.) **Girlie Night.** This merry skein of loves lost and found in holiday-season London is written and directed by *Four Weddings and a Funeral* scribe Curtis. (*) @Alamo Ritz, Sunday, 9:30pm.



THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL D: Scott Derrickson; with Keanu Reeves, Jennifer Connelly, Kathy Bates, Jaden Smith, John Cleese, Jon Hamm, Kyle Chandler. (PG-13, 103 min.)

Unsurprisingly, this loud, hammy, and, above all, pointless do-over only serves to point out the genius of the original. Screenwriter David Scarpa sticks to the rudiments of Edmund H. North's 1951 script but garnishes the film's overriding and still-resonant message with wooden warnings from the equally wooden Reeves and then ladles on the CGI destruction to little effect. Reeves, displays precious few emotions and even less acting. He plays the character of Klaatu (who is, lest we forget, the potential destroyer and/or savior of all mankind) as though he were on robo-pilot. Connelly does her best as the sci-gal whose rocky relationship with her preteen stepson eventually leads to tears, hugs, and the redemption of all mankind (maybe). But even she – or a stern Bates or a decidedly unsilly cameo by Cleese – can't save this dull, unnecessary film from its total lack of "Gosh, wow!" sense of wonder. (12/12/2008) – Marc Savlov

★ Alamo Drafthouse Lake Creek, Alamo Drafthouse Village, Barton Creek Square, CM Cedar Park, Hill Country Galleria, CM Round Rock, Southpark Meadows, Highland, Gateway, Lakeline, Tinseltown North, Tinseltown South, Westgate

EAGLE EYE D: D.J. Caruso; with Shia LaBeouf, Michelle Monaghan, Rosario Dawson, Michael Chiklis, Anthony Mackie, Ethan Embry, Billy Bob Thornton, Anthony Azizi. (PG-13, 118 min.)

I could be wrong, but it feels like *Eagle Eye* is arriving a few months late. With its frenetic car chases; its near-erotic fascination with explosions, gadgets, and guns; and its improbable and, in the end, totally disposable storyline, it's the very definition of a summer blockbuster: good, manic fun plus a heavy dose of political intrigue adding up to two hours of clamorous, mind-numbing nonsense. Jerry Shaw (LaBeouf) is a sweet-talking slacker with a chip on his shoulder who gets dragged in to a violent conspiracy against the U.S. government. He is on the run from the FBI (led by a deliciously dyspeptic Thornton) after being framed as a terrorist for reasons he can't understand and narrowly escaping the gaping maw of the post-PATRIOT Act American justice system. Like *Enemy of the State*, *Eagle Eye's* backdrop is a world gone mad with surveillance and, like *The Terminator* trilogy, one where the machines have slipped their leashes and taken over. (09/26/2008) – Josh Rosenblatt
★★★★ Movies 8



JCVD

FOUR CHRISTMASSES D: Seth Gordon; with Vince Vaughn, Reese Witherspoon, Jon Favreau, Robert Duvall, Sissy Spacek, Mary Steenburgen, Jon Voight, Kristin Chenoweth, Dwight Yoakam, Tim McGraw, Katy Mixon. (PG-13, 82 min.)

No yuletide season would be complete without the crappy Christmas movie. This year's entry in this lowly subgenre is *Four Christmases*, a D-list comedy with A-list actors. (No doubt, the five Oscar winners in the cast were motivated by an easy paycheck and the audience exposure found in a critic-proof movie starring Vaughn.) Generously speaking, *Four Christmases* plays like a series of skits randomly connected to one another. So, when the script turns a serious corner to impart a warm and fuzzy message about the importance of a traditional holiday with the family, the sentimentality starts to smell. Vaughn and Witherspoon make for a cute couple – the height difference between the two alone is worth a good laugh – but their different approaches to comic acting clash onscreen. Maybe moviegoers are still keen on Vaughn, but his incessant prattling is quickly becoming stale. (11/28/2008) – Steve Davis

★ Alamo Drafthouse Lake Creek, Alamo Drafthouse Village, Barton Creek Square, CM Cedar Park, Hill Country Galleria, CM Round Rock, Southpark Meadows, Highland, Gateway, Lakeline, Tinseltown North, Tinseltown South, Westgate

IGOR D: Anthony Leondis; with the voices of John Cusack, Steve Buscemi, Eddie Izzard, John Cleese, Sean Hayes, Molly Shannon, Jennifer Coolidge, Arsenio Hall. (PG, 87 min.)

Like most acts of cruel mediocrity committed in the name of entertaining children, *Igor* presumably seemed like a good idea at the time. (Children on their own are rarely if ever mediocre in their cruelty, a subtle but key distinction that has not gone unnoticed by Tim Burton.) Based extremely loosely on the now-generic title character, this PG-rated (for "thematic elements, scary images, action, and mild language") comedy is nowhere near as visually, vocally, or narratively inspired – or likely to inspire – as Burton and Henry Selick's similarly themed animated outings. *Igor* (voiced, ingratiatingly, by Cusack) is an ambitious dreamer in the Disneyfied, follow-your-dreams-you-crazy-misfit-you mold, who seeks only to (nobly and rightly) prove his worth as a creator rather than a mere assistant. Buscemi's turn as *Igor's* suicidal bunny buddy is a canny lesson in futility, and Cleese is criminally underused. Pixar this isn't, but neither is it *Mary Shelley's VeggieTales*. (09/26/2008) – Marc Savlov
★ Movies 8