

## Film Reviews: Fantastic Four, Fido, Amu

Also *Casting About* and *Eagle Vs. Shark*

By **L.A. Weekly Film Critics** *Wednesday, Jun 13 2007*

**GO AMU** Born in India, but raised in America after being orphaned at age 3, 21-year-old Kaju (Konkona Sensharma) has returned to New Delhi as a tourist — one with a video camera and many questions about her past and that of her native country. As she makes her way around the city, Kaju begins picking up hints that the city's residents are haunted by memories of the 1984 uprisings that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi, riots in which some 5,000 Sikhs were killed at the urging, it has long been alleged, of the Indian government itself. This debut feature from writer-director Shonali Bose has a powerful finale, in which the filmmaker uses imaginative camera angles and a vibrant sound design to re-create the turmoil and terror of the riots, while also revealing melodramatic yet plausible secrets involving Kaju's birth parents. Moviegoers, however, are warned in advance to be patient, as it takes Bose, who was a college freshman living in Delhi in 1984, nearly half the film to even mention the killings, and another stretch to get to the flashbacks. Her stealthy path to revelation can be a bit maddening. That said, the flashback sequences are vibrant and intense, and the film's long closing shot is so dense with feeling for a nation and its people that Bose deserves to be noted as a filmmaker to watch. (Music Hall, Fallbrook 7) (Chuck Wilson)

### **THE BOSS OF IT ALL** [See film feature](#)

**GO CASTING ABOUT** With its sterile anonymity and forced intimacy, it's hard not to think of the audition room as an amalgam of job interview, therapy session and confessional. Culled from director Barry J. Hershey's casting tapes for a film he planned to make, *Casting About* is a nicely contemplative documentary about actors and their ambivalent relationship with that intimidating space. Footage from 184 actresses fills the movie's 86 minutes, which is broken down into thematically linked sequences such as personal histories, issues concerning nudity, and monologues. Little is revealed about Hershey's fiction film — he's casting for a model, a fashion assistant and a nun — but this only helps support *Casting About*'s underlying supposition that the audition process is, in actuality, a bizarre mating ritual between actor and filmmaker, a testing ground for creative compatibility. Because Hershey needed permission from his actresses to include their tapes, he avoids showing the sort of humiliatingly inept hopefuls that invariably provide comic fodder for reality programs. And although the film can be too precious in its insistence that every actress is special, Hershey and editor Marc Grossman mostly strike the right balance of respectful distance and bewildered curiosity about these largely unknown performers. Those who work in casting could argue that *Casting About* is just another day at the office, but by not shying away from the mundaneness of auditioning, Hershey's documentary slowly evolves beyond highfalutin concepts like "the craft of acting" into universal questions about surface beauty, inner depth and the double-

edged sword of following a dream. (Music Hall) (Tim Grierson)

**GO DOA: DEAD OR ALIVE** Praise be to director Corey Yuen (*The Transporter*) for delivering one of the year's purest entertainments — the best butt-kicking PG-13 bikini jiggle fest since the first *Charlie's Angels* flick. Based on a fighting video game, or possibly a back issue of *Maxim*, it involves a tournament on a mysterious island run — as such tournaments and islands tend to be — by an evil mastermind (Eric Roberts) with a secret agenda. Among the world warriors are a father-daughter pro-wrestling team (Kevin Nash and Jaime Pressly), an English jewel thief (Holly Valance), a renegade Japanese princess (Devon Aoki), and a black kickboxer (Brian J. White) with a green Mohawk and goatee. The film is pretty much nonstop fighting, mostly in very little clothing, with the flair you expect from a master choreographer like Yuen. It's awesome. (Selected theaters) (Luke Y. Thompson)

**EAGLE VS. SHARK** Napoleon Dynamite looks like Cary Grant next to the hero of this Kiwi quirk-a-thon: a hulking, sullen creep named Jarrod (Jemaine Clement, co-star of HBO's new *Flight of the Conchords*) whose goony sulking, petulant selfishness and dweeby video-game obsession somehow work like Spanish fly on mousy burger-flipper Lily (Loren Horsley). If the intent was to have Lily's unconditional love redeem Jarrod, who plots half-assed revenge on the bully who thumped him a decade ago in high school, no such luck — her regard for the insufferable prick comes off more as sodden masochism, or maybe brain damage. You can't see the forest for the twee in writer-director Taika Waititi's thicket of cutesy conceits, from the stunted supporting characters to the precious animated interludes. But Jarrod's strident ugliness definitely serves as a critique of geek-chic narcissism. Maybe Judd Apatow's comedies also flatter the maturity-impaired by making their 10th-grade hang-ups lovable, but Apatow doesn't leave you thinking less of the women who abide them — or wanting to gnaw the cup holder off your armrest in impatience. (ArcLight; The Landmark) (Jim Ridley)

**FANTASTIC FOUR: RISE OF THE SILVER SURFER** Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! No, it's a giant silver eunuch on a radioactive surfboard! That's more or less the gist of this mercifully brief sequel to 2005's surprise hit about that other band of Marvel mutants, here joined by the eponymous big kahuna, who at first appears villainous but turns out to be the enslaved liege of an amorphous intergalactic baddie known as the Devourer of Worlds. As before, it's tough to know how much of the movie's hambone acting, Saturday-morning-cartoon dialogue and pubescent sexual innuendo are accidental and how much by design. Still, they lend *Fantastic Four: ROTSS* an agreeable sugarcoated goofiness for the first reel or so, as erstwhile scientist Mr. Fantastic (Ioan Gruffudd) and the Invisible Woman (Jessica Alba) prep for their long-delayed nuptials amid Paris Hilton levels of media scrutiny. Then the climate-altering, blackout-causing Surfer descends from the heavens and turns the marriage of the century into the biggest wedding-day debacle since the Moldavian massacre at the end of *Dynasty* season five. After which, it's pretty by-the-numbers superhero stuff, replete with the now-requisite allusions to 9/11 (U.S. military rushing to destroy the "foreign" invader), Abu Ghraib (the Surfer tough-interrogated within an inch of his life) and, yes, even global warming. The script, credited to *Twin Peaks* co-creator Mark Frost and longtime *Simpsons* writer Don Payne, unsuccessfully strives for hipster irreverence, while one gag line about how the Promethean Ben Grimm (Michael Chiklis) gets his rocks off is

enough to make you, um, gag. (Citywide) (Scott Foundas)

FIDO You think they're dead, these zombie-film parodies, but, one after another, they keep lumbering back. Not much brain activity, alas, in this Canadian indie, which non-hilariously dispatches its walking corpses to '50s suburbia, where they're put to work as domestic servants and gardeners. For anyone who hasn't pictured the movie's 91 minutes already: In sunny Willard, docile, gray-faced zombies carry golf carts and duly provide target practice for Red Scare-era school kids, until a particularly ravenous ghoul takes a chunk out of old Mrs. Henderson's fleshy arm. Within 20 minutes, Vancouver-based writer-director Andrew Currie leads us to stop expecting actual jokes while squandering the talents of an overqualified cast that includes Dylan Baker and Carrie-Anne Moss as the film's Ward and June Cleaver, and Scottish actor Billy Connolly as the titular zombie-cum-pet and loyal pal of the couple's young son Timmy (K'Sun Ray). The movie's Pleasantville sets are well-designed on a slim budget, but the '50s-style restraint extends to Currie's tame direction and makes a zombie-lover hungry for the real deal, à la 28 Weeks Later — which was still taking a bite out of the box office at last check. (Nuart) (Rob Nelson)

HOSTEL: PART II Eli Roth is obviously a poseur, but on the evidence of Hostel: Part II, he's also kind of a pussy. The sequel to Roth's vile hit Hostel is too goofy to disturb, too silly to scare, closer in spirit (if not in skill) to the cartoon yuks of Evil Dead II than to the transgressive classics it so desperately tries to trump. H2 duplicates the original scenario but flips the gender. So long, frat boys — it's ladies' night! The meat puppets include Lauren German as the nice girl with a trust fund, Bijou Phillips as the slut and Heather Matarazzo as the dork. En route to Prague, they're lured into a Slovakian snuff club where high-rolling psychopaths bid top dollar for the pleasure of killing. And the violence? Very nasty indeed, if neutered by Roth's pathetic desperation to shock. The most disturbing thing about this implausibly R-rated spectacle is what it says about the double standard of the MPAA. Apparently, you can linger over a cock in close-up so long as it's being cut in half by a pair of scissors. Getting an audience to whoop in pleasure at graphic castration is less an expression of some twisted feminist agenda, as our disingenuous auteur would have us believe, than a dirty little YouTube stunt writ large. (Citywide) (Nathan Lee)

NANCY DREW [See film feature.](#)

THE TREATMENT [See film feature.](#)

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