



Sharon Stone in *Casino*.

## THE YOUNG POISONER'S HANDBOOK

Director: Benjamin Ross

Loosely based on a grisly case of the early 60s involving a teenage lad with a Crippen bent, Benjamin Ross's first film opens breathlessly and stylishly. It's 1961 and we're in a North London suburb, with a well-scrubbed family sitting around the telly watching a deathless variety show. All except young Graham, that is, who's elsewhere, poring over his chemistry set.

Trauma follows trauma. In one sitting-room confrontation, it's revealed that Sister Winnie (the marvellous Charlotte Coleman) uses... depilatory cream; in another, Graham gets unjustly accused of hoarding girlie magazines... these scenes show *Handbook* at its best — catching the batty, repressed hysteria of those times.

Graham ends up in a mental hospital and (later) finds employment in a photographic laboratory, and Ross's film becomes rather more laboured. Pretentious even, as Graham pursues his alchemical ambitions to make diamonds from antimony. When his late stepmum makes a surprise appearance in the toilet bowl, Ross achieves a minor frisson, but the director throws it all away with a particularly feeble chunder joke, which wouldn't even make the semi-finals in a Les Pattinson Award. The best? Without a doubt that tasty moment in Robert Altman's *Brewster McLeod*, when Shelley Duvall gives Bud Cort a passionate open-mouth kiss immediately after losing her lunch.

WILLIAM DART

## KIDS

Director: Larry Clark

Larry Clark's first feature is disturbing, make no doubt about it, a film which, if nothing else, alerts its audiences to the creeping dangers of complacency. *Kids* presents a day in the life of a gang of New York teenagers as they prowls around the streets, skateboards at the ready, their lives a trinity of drugs, sex and violence, beautifully documented in Harmony Korine's script.

And scripted it is, even though the film is imbued with the spirit of a documentary. But this is artful naturalism, perfectly caught through the lens of Eric Edwards' edgy, hand-held camera — Edwards is the cameraman who lent such a distinctive patina to Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*, and Van Sant is executive producer of Clark's movie.

*Kids* doesn't offer pat solutions. As for point of view? Well, there just isn't one. Clark simply pre-

sents his material, as he did with those images of junkies and teenage killers in his earlier photographic folios. In this way, his film is a continuation of a tradition of American documentary photography from Walker Evans through to Robert Frank and Diane Arbus.

If there is any strong point that comes out of *Kids*' 90 minutes, it's about the utter ruthlessness of the male animal, summed up in the brutal sexploits of 17-year old Telly, a self-styled 'virgin surgeon', who makes his first score in the opening scene of the movie. These young boys pack hunt, climaxing in the scene where Telly's chief acolyte, Casper (Justin Pierce), lets loose in a scene of distressing sexual coercion.

Telly's sexual obsession is heightened by the fact he is HIV positive, and the strongest narrative strand of this remarkably free-form film has one of his deflowered virgins (Chloe Sevigny) desperately seeking her seducer. At a time when too many young heterosexuals are unaware of their vulnerability to AIDS, Clark's film is fearlessly placing this issue into a public and (thanks to Miramax Films) highly publicised arena.

WILLIAM DART

## THE KINGDOM

Director: Lars von Trier

Isn't it exceedingly peculiar that in these times when discretionary leisure seems more and more at a premium, we are being deluged with what have become the latter-day equivalents of the three-volume Victorian novel — CD anthologies and films which shamelessly clock in at the three-hour-plus mark.

*The Kingdom* goes one better: this Danish delight is four-and-a-half hours long. Our cousins in Copenhagen saw it, as it was designed, in four palatable TV instalments; for us, it's a long haul at the theatre.

Sustaining any film over this time scale is a challenge, and even more so for jaded aficionados of the horror genre. Don't expect *The Reanimator 3* — *The Kingdom* is distinctly low-key. There are a few murky goings-on, past and present, in this monolithic Copenhagen hospital, but, in any case, with the film being shot in a pink/orange blur, the little blood that is spilt is reduced to generic dark patches.

There are some bizarre touches to be sure, most of them caught by frenetic hand-held camera, ranging from Masonic rambles to a touch of ye olde voodoo. The occasional graphic moment (zombies munching on a patient's arm) come far and few between, and the genuinely chilling (the reconstruction of the dead girl's scream in the audiology department) aren't really capitalised on. If tired eyes can cope with almost illegible

subtitles, there's a lot of chatter to follow, from the Swedophile rantings of Ernst Hugo Järevard's pompous surgeon to the surreal conversations between two Down's syndrome dishwashers. The stand out is Kirsten Rolffes' determined ghostbuster. Like Mai Zetterling's grandmother in *The Witches*, this performance almost touches the heart.

Be warned. This interminable saga ends with the worrisome legend 'To Be Continued'. Von Trier jests not — a sequel is in production.

WILLIAM DART

## CASINO

Director: Martin Scorsese

...or, *Goodfellas* take two. *Casino* is a gamble that doesn't quite come off. This rambling (three hours of it!) morality tale of love and trust fits neatly enough into the Scorsese canon but, alas, the director's earlier films took but half the time to make the same point.

Some brilliant Saul Bass titles usher in a flabby first hour, burdened by its documentary-like presentation of the workings of the gambling establishment, and not helped by some confusion as to whose eyes we're looking through. It's not until Sharon Stone enters, as the lucre-crazed Ginger, that the plot starts to focus itself on some Scorsesian inevitability.

Scorsese works through his usual cinematic flourishes — from the airborne De Niro in the credits sequence and the Stroheim-like vision of Stone all but drooling over her diamonds and gold, to the usual arty dissolves. The music is utterly integral to the film and fascinating in the way it heightens Scorsese's visuals, ranging as it does from Bach and Louis Prima to lashings of early Stones. Scorsese seems to be encouraging a certain deadpan quality to the playing and often De Niro's brash one-colour ensembles speak more loudly than the actor. Stone, despite all the Academy Award brouhaha, is too often simply strident and sometimes registers as little more than a 70s clotheshorse.

There are some neat character sketches, with Joe Pesci once more playing the gentle tough guy ("Be nice, be fucking nice") and De Niro as brilliant as ever at couching deadly rage in the gentlest of guises (his final domestic argument with the hysterical Stone is a classic).

The pacing picks up when the film starts to dispose of the villains with style and sadistic ingenuity, and Scorsese even allows himself some nostalgia at the end of the movie, when the aging De Niro reminisces about the Las Vegas that once was. Sadly, he may well have been talking about the director.

WILLIAM DART

The **Cohen Brothers** are back with the pitch black, dare-you-to-call-it-a-comedy *Fargo*, which is based on the true story of a 1987 kidnapping scam which went seriously amuck ... other good news in the returns department concerns **David Lynch**, who's back with *Lost Highway*, which stars **Bill Pullman** and **Patricia Arquette**. Arquette also co-stars with **Ben Stiller** in **David O Russell's** *Spanking the Monkey* follow-up, *Flirting With Disaster*. Meanwhile, Stiller is back behind the camera for his *Reality Bites* follow-up, *Cable Guy* — a comedy starring **Jim Carrey** and **Matthew Broderick** ... **Woody Harrelson** has found himself associated with another allegedly 'copy-cat crime' inspiring picture in *Money Train*. Two days after the film's US opening, two men, in an incident similar to one from the film, poured petrol over a Brooklyn subway ticket booth and set it alight. A 50-year-old station worker was burned as a result, and later died. New York subway workers have appealed for a boycott of the film, while Republican senator Bob Dole (the man who mouthed off most noisily over *Natural Born Killers*) called for a total ban of it, to no avail ... while we still wait for the appearance of **Liv Tyler** on our big screens, her buzz keeps growing. After filming **Tom Hanks'** directorial debut, *That Thing You Do* — the story of a fictional 60s rock band who reach a turning point at the crest of their popularity — she will shoot *Inventing the Abbotts*, from *Circle of Friends* director **Pat O'Connor** ... **Woody Allen's** latest film (apparently a musical) sees him teamed up with **Goldie Hawn**, **Julia Roberts**, **Tim Roth** and (you guessed it) **Liv Tyler** ... the daughter of *Midnight Cowboy* Jon Voight, **Angeline Jolie**, has been marked as one to watch due to her debut in **Iain Softley's** *Back Beat* follow-up, the hi-tech fest-cum-comic thriller *Hackers* ... Bosnian director **Emir Kusturica** has vowed to quit the world of film after his Palme D'Or winning *Underground* was denounced by critics as Serbian propaganda, promoting the idea of a united Yugoslavia ... **Pedro Almodóvar** has dispensed with his kinky sex and garish visual trademarks for his latest film, *The Flower of My Secret*. **Marisa Paredes** stars as a middle-aged romance author who embarks on a voyage of self discovery when her life starts crumbling. **Rossi De Palma** and **Chus Lampreave** co-star ... **Matt Dillon** is joined by **Lauren Holly**, **Timothy Hutton**, **Rosie O'Donnell**, **Mira Sorvino**, **Martha Plimpton** and **Uma Thurman** in **Ted Demme's** *Beautiful Girls*. Dillon describes it as being "about that post-holiday blah thing". He also stars in *Albino Alligator* alongside **Fay Dunaway**, **M Emmet Walsh**, **Joe Mantegna** and **Gary Sinise** ... **Liz Hurley** will play a law bending stripper in an as-yet-untitled film being shot in South Africa. She is also co-producing *Extreme Measures* with her beloved, **Hugh Grant** ... **Mary Harron's** *I Shot Andy Warhol* is the story of the woman who shot Andy Warhol (duh!), and stars **Lili Taylor**, **Stephen Dorff** (as drag queen Candy Darling) and **Donovon Leitch** ... **Leonardo DiCaprio** stars alongside **Meryl Streep** and **Diane Keaton** in *Marvin's Room* ... **Sharon Stone** gives up the wonderful trash-chic 70-80s wardrobe she boasts in *Casino*, to play a woman who has been on death row for her entire adult life in **Bruce Beresford's** *Last Dance*. She has also teamed up with the time transcendingly beautiful **Isabelle Adjani** and **Chazz Palminteri** in **Jeremiah Chechik's** remake of **Henri-Georges Clouzot's** French classic, *Les Diaboliques*, simply entitled *Diabolique* ... **Drew Barrymore**, **Jennifer Beals** and **James LeGros** star in *Wishful Thinking*. LeGros plays a projectionist at a revival theatre, who literally sees his life like a movie ... *Trainspotting*, based on the novel by Irvine Welsh, is the new film from the makers of *Shallow Grave* ... **Jon Bon Jovi** will follow his role in the upcoming *Moonlight and Valentino* with a lead in **John Duigan's** *The Leading Man*, alongside **Lambert Wilson** and **Anna Galiena** ... *Kids* co-star **Justin Pierce** has a role as **Cathy Moriarty's** son in *Brother's Kiss*, which also features **Rosie Perez**, **Michael Rappaport**, **Marisa Tomei** and **John Leguizamo**, and is directed by **Seth Rosenfield** ... the scheduled New Zealand releases of the tragic *The Scarlet Letter* (Demi Moore and Gary Oldman) and the more worthy *Beyond Rangoon* (Patricia Arquette) have been cancelled ... **Dr Haing S Ngor** was shot dead in Chinatown, Los Angeles, on February 27. Ngor became the first non-professional actor to receive an Academy Award (as best supporting actor) since 1946 for his role as Dith Pran in *The Killing Fields* (1984), and went on to act in eight more films and several television series' ... *Double Life of Veronique*, *Red*, *White and Blue* director **Krzysztof Kieslowski** (54) died of a heart attack on March 16, after undergoing a heart bypass operation.