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Peyton Flanders (Rebecca DeMornay) intimidates handyman Solomon (Ernie Hudson) in 'The Hand That Rocks the Cradle.'

## 'Cradle' plays on our darkest fears

by Ched Whitney

What is a parent's worst nightmare? Someone getting close or endangering their child.

*The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, one of the first two movie releases of 1992, brings its audience to its knees with a story of a babysitter's scheming.

Rebecca DeMornay plays the wife of a gynecologist who's accused of abusing a new patient and subsequently commits suicide. Meanwhile, she has a miscarriage and is left feeling like her life has been ruined.

The object of her frustration is Claire Bartel (Annabella Sciorra, taking a step down in class after *Jungle Fever*), a suburbanite with a seemingly "perfect" life, who has just given birth.

DeMornay's Peyton Flanders (the former Mrs. Mott)

seduces Claire and her husband Michael (Matt McCoy) into hiring her as their babysitter. It is then that DeMornay begins her systematic scheming.

Director Curtis Hanson is fairly adept at building suspense, as he was with his previous films *Bad Influence* and *The Bedroom Window*.

But as he gets the audience squirming, he neglects some of his characters. Whenever

DeMornay's character is around the men in the movie turn into blubbing fools.

The film's smartest male character is actually Solomon, the Bartel's mentally-impaired handyman. Ernie Hudson's performance—as Solomon—is *Cradle's* best. He brings a quiet believability to the role without overplaying it.

Despite its flaws, *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* offers up some cheap thrills.

### MOVIE REVIEW

#### The Hand That Rocks the Cradle (★★★)

Starring Annabella Sciorra, Rebecca DeMornay and Ernie Hudson. Directed by Curtis Hanson.

## TOP 10

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films were much more of a let-down when all was said and done because the expectation level for each film was quite high.

5) *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* - Dark and monotonous. Costner could have used a box of No-Doz and a couple cups of joe to wake him up from his sleep-walk through this role. The only redeeming qualities of the film were Morgan Freeman's and Christian Slater's portrayals of Robin Hood's merry men.

4) *Cape Fear* - Over-rated, cliché thriller that had more loopholes than Swiss cheese. Severely underdeveloped characters like Jessica Lange's also put a damper on this film. Another down note is that the only intriguing story line featuring the twisted attraction between Robert DeNiro and Juliette Lewis was dropped like a hot potato. Masterpiece? C'mon. However, there is no denying

DeNiro's frightening performance.

3) *Shattered* - With a cast that features Bob Hoskins and Greta Scacchi, you would think this yawner might be watchable. Please, wake me when it's over.

2) *Highlander 2: The Quickening* - The original installment was a cult classic involving a swashbuckling story featuring that dashing duo of Christopher Lambert and Sean Connery while the second installment failed to highlight either actor's talent.

1) *Hook* - From Steven Spielberg you expect quite a bit more than this dreary mess. It takes two hours for anything to happen in this sorry picture and when some action goes down, it isn't even that grand. The child actors in this movie also need to be reprimanded; they are pitiful. Maybe next time they should try not looking at the camera so much.

# Without Slater, 'Kuffs' doesn't add up to much

by Daniel W. Duffy

It's rather difficult to categorize the new Christian Slater vehicle, *Kuffs*. It's a cop drama, a Zucker Brothers-like slapstick comedy and some kind of new-fangled buddy story with action-adventure and a touch of romance all combined into one enchilada.

Slater stars as George Kuffs, a pipe dream slacker who takes over his brother's law enforcement/security guard company when his bro is gunned down in cold blood.

Slater is chipper as usual, but the problem here lies with his supporting cast which is flimsy to say the least—except for his tango partner/love interest Milla Jovovich (*Return to*

*the Blue Lagoon*). A movie of this nature needs a much more solid villain like an Alan Rickman (*Die Hard*, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*) or perhaps an up-and-coming actor like Julian Sands (*Gothic*, *Warlock*) instead of a milk toast Fisher Stevens look-alike (George De La Pena), who isn't the least bit intimidating. Even with the weak cast, this film could have been far more interesting had they explored Slater and Jovovich's modern dysfunctional relationship to a further degree. Together on screen, they only share about 10 minutes of the film.

Slater is rather jovial in this role when he's not borrowing his own chuckle

from *Pump Up the Volume*, and basically, he owns this movie. This film isn't brilliant, but it's not awful either. The comedy writing from *Kuffs* is aimed at a younger *Tiger Beat* audience that sprawl Slater pin-ups all over their bedrooms, but they do throw in a few laughs for adults as well. *Kuffs* at least ranks higher on the Christian Slater career totem pole than earlier duds like *Gleaming the Cube*.

### MOVIE REVIEW

#### Kuffs (★★★)

Starring Christian Slater and Milla Jovovich. Directed by Bruce A. Evans

## In case you missed it

*Bugsy* ★★★ - If glamor was his disguise, then Warren Beatty is as sleek and dangerous as ever. After a rather monotonous *Dick Tracy*, Beatty returns to the silver screen with charismatic flash and style as the psycho-gangster Benjamin "Don't call me Bugsy" Siegel, one of the pioneers of Las Vegas itself, in the Tri-Star film, *Bugsy*.

Beatty puts in a gripping performance as Siegel, a man with lofty expectations and dreams. It was Siegel who originally conceived the idea for a gambling "oasis in the desert." The story revolves around Siegel and his rise to power in organized crime in California following a successful mob stint on the East Coast with the likes of Meyer Lansky and Charlie "Lucky" Luciano. In California he meets his love interest/child of joy, Virginia Hill played by Annette Benning (*Regarding Henry*, *The Grifters*). Siegel is a man who charms every woman he meets and almost uses womanizing as a hobby, yet he falls for the femme fatale/toast of the town and puts too much faith in Hill.

When *Bugsy* gets rolling on his idea of building the palatial Flamingo Hotel in a dust trap they call Las Vegas, his crime-boss financial backers think he's a little off his rocker. But Siegel was a man with a vision. When he comes in way over budget on more than one occasion, the big boys on the East Coast are a little fed up with his tirades. But thanks to his longtime friend Lansky (played superbly by Ghandi himself, Ben Kingsley) the project is completed and draws a parallel to the opening of Jett Rink's (James Dean) hotel/resort in the George Stevens classic *Giant*.

Beatty is at his finest since his early days in films like *Splendor in the Grass* and adds a certain tenderness and humor to the role of the infamous gangster. Beatty gives *Bugsy* an intensity that strikes a reckless fear in all those who cross him, yet he has compassion for those close to him, and is always ready to give people a second chance, a "fresh start."

Although Benning's character is weakly developed and spiteful at times, Beatty carries the weight of the entire film on his back

in classic fashion. Director Barry Levinson (*Diner*, *Rain Man*) brings the vision of 1940s California and Las Vegas to life with authentic sets and big band sounds surrounded by a realistic portrayal of mobster violence. — **Daniel W. Duffy**

*JFK* ★★★★★ - Few films stir up the amount of controversy that Oliver Stone's *JFK* has.

Kevin Costner trades in his British accent (or lack of one) from *Robin Hood* for a Louisiana drawl (well done) as he plays Jim Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney who brought the conspiracy theory about who killed President Kennedy to the public.

The three hours and eight minutes seemingly fly by as Stone builds his case. The movie features a record number of cameos—including one from Garrison himself.

Stone isn't the least bit bashful in who he implicates in his conspiracy theory; he goes after everybody.

But, as film critic Roger Ebert said, "whether you think Oliver Stone's great or his head's full of sawdust," the film is truly a masterpiece. — **Ched Whitney**

*Rush* ★★★★★ - With a screenplay adapted from a novel written by a former police officer, *Rush* may be what you might have expected. But as the debut directorial effort from one of the producers of *Driving Miss Daisy*, it certainly is not.

*Rush* is the story of two small-town Texas narcotics agents—played by Jennifer Jason Leigh and Jason Patric—who maintain a thorough cover in order to get close to a local bar owner (played by Gregg Allman) suspected of running a big drug operation. It is based on the book of the same title by Kim Wozencraft, herself a former narcotics police officer.

To say the least, *Rush* is not a pretty movie. But it is not overly forceful in getting its points across; we are not bludgeoned by the script. Instead, the course of events occurring in front of us are presented in a riveting, believable order. — **Ched Whitney**

### Most overrated:

For these movies, the hype surrounding them was so great that it was nearly impossible for them to live up to their reputations. *Boyz 'N the Hood* was a good film with positive ideas, establishing director John Singleton as one of the most promising young filmmakers today. But at

times, the story of *Boyz 'N the Hood* was as slow as molasses in January. The same could be said about *Thelma & Louise*. I think I caught about 40 winks in the first hour of this film before the second hour picked up the pace. *City Slickers* was also a disappointment because of its slow-footedness. It took Billy

Crystal and company an eon to get out on the range and when they finally got there it was humorous, but their cattle drive dragged on way too long. By the time this film ended, I felt like I had been run over by a herd of cattle and I was ready for a nap.