



Batman: Back on the big screen after his comic book/little screen/big screen successes.

There's no predicting the film tastes of the American public. Last year people flocked to see a Whitney Houston musical romance, a meditation on fly-fishing and an Irish film on gender ambiguity. More surprises are in store this year as Hollywood unrolls ambitious Oscar contenders and unabashed holiday fluff. Here's a look at some of the best of the holiday lot:

### Batman: Mask of Phantasm (Warner Bros.)

The animated version of the television series arrives complete with McDonald's Happy Meal tie-ins and features the considerable vocal talent of Mark Hamill (Luke Skywalker, from our "Whatever Happened To..." files). Based on the dark television series, the film once again has the Caped Crusader dealing with his split personality. Unless the film is in 3-D, Odorama, Feel-O-Vision, or presented in virtual reality surround sound, it doesn't promise to be much different than the series, but that probably won't keep loyal fans away.

### Schindler's List (Universal)

Steven Spielberg completed post-production work on *Jurassic Park* via satellite as he crafted this ambitious epic. Liam Neeson (*Husbands and Wives*) plays a German industrialist who exploits Jewish factory workers during World War II but ends up saving their lives. If the Academy snubs Spielberg at Oscar time for this sprawling, black and white, documentary-style epic (with 30,000 extras), he has every right to sic T. Rex on them.



### The Pelican Brief (Warner Bros.)

Best-selling author John Grisham ties with William Shakespeare for the highest number of film adaptations this year. Julia Roberts-Lovett stars as a law student who knows why two Supreme Court justices were mysteriously murdered. Teaming up with a journalist (Denzel Washington), she must dodge

the usual band of legal villains in order to make the truth known. Directed by Alan Pakula (*All the President's Men*), this film should keep Roberts' career from dying young.



### In the Name of the Father (Universal)

Jim Sheridan, director of *My Left Foot*, rejoins Oscar winner Daniel Day-Lewis to deliver what should be a searing portrayal of a father-son relationship. When an Irishman is imprisoned wrongfully for IRA terrorist activities in England, his father comes to his defense and finds himself in jail as well. Although the paternal title may imply that this is another male bonding film, the amazing Emma Thompson (*Howard's End*) provides her unique feminine touch.

### What's Eating Gilbert Grape (Paramount)

Johnny Depp (*Benny & Joon*) plays Gilbert Grape in perhaps the most bizarre entry of the yuletide film crop, a strange comedy/drama about the unpredictable life of a dysfunctional family. Darlene Cates gives a 500-pound performance as the Grapes' mother and Juliette Lewis (*Cape Fear*) plays a mysterious stranger in town who helps Gilbert extract his emotional seeds.



### Philadelphia (TriStar)

A gay attorney (Tom Hanks) is fired from his firm when he develops AIDS, and Denzel Washington plays the homophobic lawyer hired to defend him. Director Jonathan Demme, who caught a lot of flack for his creepy depiction of homosexuality with the

transvestite serial killer in *Silence of the Lambs*, mends the appropriate fences with this compassionate courtroom drama.

### Six Degrees of Separation (MGM)

The award-winning play by John Guare has become an unexpected premise for a film, starring Will Smith of *Fresh Prince* fame. Smith's savvy character convinces well-to-do New York couple Stockard Channing (*Grease*) and Donald Sutherland (*Backdraft*) that he is Sidney Poitier's son. The trio go on a tour of the city, forcing the socialites to re-examine their outlook on life.



### The War Room (October Films)

Documentary pioneer D.A. Pennebaker co-directs this look at Bill Clinton's victorious campaign. The film focuses on James Carville and George Stephanopoulos as they work their magic in the now-legendary Little Rock war room. Viewers get a rare glance at the making of an American president.



### More December flicks:

*Gerónimo: An American Legend*, starring Jason Patric and Gene Hackman; *I Dangerous Woman*, starring Debra Winger as a disturbed outcast caught up in a love triangle; *Whoopi Goldberg's Sister Act II*; *Tombstone* with Kurt Russell playing the gunslinging Wyatt Earp; and *Wrestling Ernest Hemingway*, featuring Robert Duvall and Richard Harris as skinny-dipping retirees. ■ **Stephen Brown, The Gamecock, U. of South Carolina**

## on the set

Comedy is always risky — especially in these politically correct times. Even the most innocent joke might offend someone, somewhere. But that's exactly what the makers of *P.C.U.* want.

Starring *Saturday Night Live* regular David Spade, *P.C.U.*, scheduled to be released by Fox early next year, focuses on Port Chester U., a campus divided into cliques like the Malcolms, the Wornynists, the Causeheads and the Stoners. Taking advantage of the conflict is a PC dean who's in cahoots with a pseudo-right-wing society led by Spade.

"We want an uptight response. We want to tweak the noses of those who take themselves too seriously," says producer Paul Schiff (*My Cousin Vinny*).

Spade agrees. He says it's time to take a stand — comically speaking. "Even with [SNL] you can't get away with as much," says Spade. "Everyone's just so hypersensitive. You need somebody to stand up and say, 'Shut up. It's just a joke.'" ■ **Steve Graystock, The Varsity, U. of Toronto**



David Spade enrolls at P.C.U.

## video calendar

Holiday movie classics (and some not-so-classics)

**A Christmas Carol** (1938, '51, '84); **Holiday Inn** (1942); **Christmas in Connecticut** (1945, '92); **The Bishop's Wife** (1947); **It's a Wonderful Life** (1946); **Miracle on 34th Street** (1947); **Holiday Affair** (1949); **White Christmas** (1954); **Homecoming: A Christmas Story** (1971); **Home for the Holidays** (1972); **You Better Watch Out** (1980); **A Christmas Story** (1983); **Silent Night, Deadly Night** (1984, '87, '89, '91); **A Very Brady Christmas** (1988); **Scrooged** (1988); **National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation** (1989); **Home Alone** (1990, '92); **The Muppet Christmas Carol** (1992)

## quotable

"It was a little difficult because there were photographers and reporters waiting around campus for me, and I really wanted to quietly fit in."

—Sara Gilbert, star of *Poison Ivy* and TV's *Roseanne*, on her arrival at Yale U.