

Reel

BY BONNIE DATT

THIS WINTER, THEATERS WILL BE chock full of screwball comedies that will tickle your funny bone, winsome romances that will touch your heart and hair-raising adventures that will fondle — hey! Keep the hands on the popcorn, buster. That's not what they mean by feel-good movie of the year.



Bed of Roses

New Line

When a man you've never met suddenly gives you flowers, that's... brilliance (chicks love that stuff). Or stupidity (that's expensive). But odds are on the former, if Christian Slater's doing the sending. Mary Stuart Masterson (*Benny and Joon*) is the sendee, a workaholic who needs a pick-me-up.

Broken Arrow

20th Century Fox



John Woo, who has directed some of the most kick-ass action sequences out there, takes to the air. John Travolta and Christian Slater play Stealth bomber pilots pitted against each other in a race to recover a stolen nuclear weapon. (English, Cantonese subtitles.) (Just kidding.)

Two If by Sea

Warner Bros.



Comedian Denis Leary plays a petty thief who has to blend in with rich folks to pull off his latest job. Sandra Bullock (*The Net*) plays the girlfriend who starts to prefer blue blood over blue collar. Expect extreme cuteness and severaliffs on the joys of smoking. (The cute one would be Bullock.)

Black Sheep

Paramount

In *Tommy Boy*, Chris Farley played a screw-up trying to get into the family business. David Spade was supposed to keep him out of trouble. In this, Farley is the screw-up brother of a guber-

natorial candidate. Spade is supposed to keep him out of trouble.

Mr. Holland's Opus

Hollywood Pictures

Richard Dreyfuss stars in a moving drama about the career that got away. He's a musician who takes a temporary job as a teacher. When temporary stretches to 30 years, it'll take at least a music-filled sequence with slow dissolves to make him realize that those who can, sometimes do — teach.



Beautiful Girls

Miramax

This movie stars Matt Dillon, Timothy Hutton, Michael Rapaport, Rosie O'Donnell... Wait, the title says — oh, and Lauren Holly, Mira Sorvino, Annabeth Gish and... drum roll please... Uma Thurman. Uh huh. And Natalie Portman (*The Professional*) is the beautiful-girl-in-training.



Mr. Wrong

Touchstone Pictures

Before *While You Were Sleeping*, Bill Pullman was always a Mr. Wrong. With Sandra Bullock's help, he became a Mr. Right. So now he's ready to be a seeming Mr. Right who's actually Mr. Wrong. All right? All right. Ellen DeGeneres (TV's *Ellen*) plays Ms. Right.



Rumble in the Bronx

New Line

Hong Kong? Phooey! Jackie Chan plays a Hong Kong cop who didn't think he'd have to do any cop stuff while he was in the States for a wedding. But his family's smack dab in the middle of the South Bronx. Heck, you need to be a martial arts expert just to get through to the cake.



Dead Man Walking

Gramercy

Sean Penn plays a death row inmate. Susan

Sarandon plays a nun who becomes his pen pal. He turns out to be a likable sort, and they fall and love and live happily ever — well, not quite. He's pretty much a crumb, but she does take pity on him and fights to save him from execution.

The Juror

Columbia

Again, Demi Moore plays a single mother, but this time she doesn't have to wear a scarlet "A" for it. She gets on the jury for the trial of a mobster. If she votes guilty, she and her little boy may get the death penalty. Alec Baldwin also stars as one of the bad guys.



City Hall

Castle Rock

A 6-year-old is killed in a shootout. The SuperFriends gather to... oops, wrong Hall. Al Pacino plays a popular New York mayor. John Cusack is his devoted deputy mayor. Bridget Fonda is the lawyer who will turn the city (and probably Cusack) upside down to solve the case.



Eye for an Eye

Paramount

Her daughter is murdered. The killer gets off. She's out to settle the score. Who else could play the gutsy mom but the woman who, between movies and TV, has had every possible tragedy befall her babies? Here, Sally Field faces a much worse foe than Robin Williams in a dress.



Dunston Checks In

20th Century Fox

There's nothing like a simian to perk up a comedy. You've got it — Dunston's an orangutan who wreaks havoc on the life of hotel manager Robert Grant (Jason Alexander, TV's *Seinfeld*). Paul "Pee Wee" Reubens plays the animal control officer. Just don't get a banana peel near that set!



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Screen Saver

Under the Hula Moon

Any movie that goes straight to video must be a stinker, right?

Or just hard to market. Like one that features, say, a man with a *Hawaii 5-0* obsession, a woman who hangs upside down to facilitate pregnancy, a psycho escaped con, an intervening Hawaiian god and the guy who played Lurch on TV's *The Addams Family*.

And it's a love story. Well, a comic love story. With a lot of violence. Think *True Romance*.

The story is about Buzz and Betty Wall (Stephen Baldwin, *The Usual Suspects*, and Emily Lloyd, *A River Runs Through It*), who live in a trailer in the desert but dream of a better life in Hawaii once Buzz's invention — a camouflage sunscreen with an SPF of over

150 — takes off.

Buzz's brother Turk (Christopher Penn, *Reservoir Dogs*) shows up, takes their money, kidnaps Betty and kills a few people — not necessarily in that order.

The local wannabe-TV-tabloid-reporter sets off with Buzz on a *Twin Peaks*-ish quest to save Betty, but only after the Publisher's Clearinghouse consolation crew visits, which is way after a weirdo neighbor straddles a giant pumpkin but before some L.A. gang members get lost in Mexico looking for Las Vegas.

Maybe you have to see it to believe it.



The Reel Deal

Nightjohn

OK, I'm in college. I know how to read. I know it's important. Why would a movie like *Nightjohn*, which tells of a mythical slave who escapes but returns to teach other slaves to read and write, appeal to me?

From the set in Sumter, S.C., Carl Lumbly (TV's *MANTIS*, *Cagney and Lacey*), who plays *Nightjohn*, explains that it wasn't until college that he really learned about slavery.

And talking to high school students to prepare for the role convinced him that reading isn't necessarily understanding.

"We [as blacks] are programmed to believe that our constitution has more to do with our brawn than our brains. But if you learn about the institution of slavery in our country, you realize that just to survive the Middle Passage required people with strength, intelligence and passion.

"In an age where information is so easily accessible, we need to be able to read and write to access this information and to then spread our pride."

With understanding, Lumbly says, comes movements like the Million Man March.

"We're being called to be accountable for ourselves. It's the best way to be in touch with ourselves and to pass that pride on."

Beau Bridges also stars in *Nightjohn*, which is scheduled to air on the Disney channel in June.