



Clash of the Titans

Pairing up the hottest studio and indie flicks.

FILMMAKING HAS ITS OWN CLASS SYSTEM: Studio-created blockbusters with huge stars (or at least huge budgets) on the one hand, and more economical (and often more human-scaled) independently financed movies on the other. Since the themes are often the same, our selective look at this fall's releases pairs up one film from each side of the tracks, to illuminate the differences—and the similarities. You can decide which flicks show true class, and which are simply crass.—MICHAEL GILTZ

Studio film

Disaster Strikes

Titanic (Paramount).

Passengers Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet strike sparks as their ship strikes an iceberg.

Independent film

The Sweet Hereafter

(Fine Line Features). A school bus accident devastates a small town. Starring the great Ian Holm.

Our take

Only God could sink this *Titanic*, but *Hereafter's* Canadian director, Atom Egoyan (*Exotica*), keeps getting better, and the bus crash is haunting.

My Best Friend's a Homo

Old Friends (TriStar).

Curmudgeon Jack Nicholson falls for single mom Helen Hunt while caring for a dog belonging to his gay neighbor (Greg Kinnear).

One Night Stand (New Line). After *Leaving Las Vegas*, Mike Figgis has Wesley Snipes fooling around with Nastassja Kinski. Gay buddy Robert Downey Jr. gets sick with AIDS. How original.

Casting bland Kinnear as a gay man is some kind of progress: We're officially boring. Still, every lesbian will hope that if grizzled Jack can get ahead with Helen, they could really score.

Studio film

The Hitler Channel

Seven Years in Tibet

(TriStar/Mandalay). Brad Pitt says, "Hello, Dalai" as tutor to the boy Lama while World War II brews. He learns a few things himself.

Independent film

Bent (MGM). Martin Sherman's classic play about gay men imprisoned in Nazi Germany finally becomes a movie, with cameos from Sir Ian McKellen and Mick Jagger.

Our take

Tibet director Jean-Jacques Annaud bets that Pitt's star power will beat out Martin Scorsese's rival Dalai pic *Kundun*. But can Brad look spiritually awakened? We're willing to find out.

Misfit Kid Makes Good

Gattaca (Columbia). Ethan Hawke is born imperfect (huh?) in a genetically programmed—and lavishly realized—future society. Sadly, he chases after Uma Thurman rather than co-star Jude Law.

Good Will Hunting (Miramax). Working-class genius Matt Damon doesn't fit in with his old buddy (Ben Affleck) or his college-educated sweetie (Minnie Driver). Gus Van Sant directs.

After his *To Die For* critical triumph, Van Sant is in command—but may be deprived of his usual tools of edgy irony and offbeat riffs. *Gattaca*, meanwhile, is both gorgeous and smart. See it.

Let's Do It Again

Alien Resurrection (20th Century Fox). Ripley's clone (Sigourney Weaver) teams with neophyte action hero Winona Ryder to do battle against the beasties.

Scream 2 (Miramax). The kids who didn't get offed last time—Neve Campbell, David Arquette, Courtney Cox—hope their luck holds out, this time on a college campus.

Will metadiscussions of movie sequels be enough to make a second *Scream* as smart as the first? And would they have bothered doing *Alien 4* unless it's going to kick ass?



TWOSOMES: Sequel fun in a horror vein with *Alien Resurrection* (left) and *Scream 2* (right).



Let's Put on a Show

Anastasia (Fox Family Films). Veteran animator-at-large Don Bluth retells the fable of the lost Russian princess, with Disney-esque songs and the voices of Meg Ryan, John Cusack, and Bernadette Peters.

Slaves to the Underground (First Look). The Seattle indie music scene finds newcomers Molly Gross, Marisa Ryan, and Jason Bortz in our kind of romantic triangle.

Anastasia may be more adult and romantic than any cartoon since *Beauty and the Beast*—it's even got Angela Lansbury. But *Slaves* wins the blue ribbon for hipness with its ultracool soundtrack.

Read the Book, See the Flick

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil (Warner Bros.). John Berendt's indefatigable bestseller, with John Cusack as the writer and Kevin Spacey as the gay antique dealer and suspected murderer.

Jackie Brown (Miramax). Elmore Leonard's *Rum Punch* gets Quentin Tarantino-ed, with blaxploitation queen Pam Grier as an airline stewardess caught between cops and dealers.

Midnight can't miss, with Clint Eastwood at the helm and The Lady Chablis living the fantasy, playing herself. Note to Quentin: Fewer interviews and moonlighting as an actor, more movies.

Get Sharon Stone

Sphere (Warner Bros.). Dustin Hoffman and Samuel L. Jackson examine an alien object found at the bottom of the ocean. Stone plays a biochemist.

The Mighty (Miramax). Two boys, a slow-witted giant and a tiny Einstein in leg braces (Kieran Culkin), find strength in numbers. Stone plays Culkin's mom.

With Gillian Anderson in a small role, start with *The Mighty*. *Sphere* director Barry Levinson (*Diner*, *Rain Man*) should stay out of Spielberg territory.