

'Almost' Perfect:

Cameron Crowe's new film celebrates the sanctity of happiness amidst the den of 70s sin
by Deanna Symoski

The irony here is obvious: a boy lovingly instructed never to take drugs falls in love with a girl at the exact moment she overdoses. Perhaps in any other movie, the irony would be trite, but in Cameron Crowe's new film there is no such thing. It's just an honest example of the cruxes in life.

Based on Crowe's own experiences, *Almost Famous* is the story of William Miller (played by newcomer Patrick Fugit), a bright-beyond-his-years misfit who taps into "cool" with the rock albums his sister leaves behind after she flees their strict, but well-meaning mother played Frances McDormand. As a college professor, Elaine tries desperately to shield her children from the gluttonous paradise of the early 70's only to cloak it in alluring mystery.

William grows into the frenetic utopia of his world of music and begins writing about it in local publications. But at age 15, when "Rolling Stone" sends him on tour with a show opener named Stillwater, he must struggle to bring back that elusive thousand words about and



TMS PHOTO
Billy Crudup (left) and writer/director Cameron Crowe on the set of *Almost Famous*

despite sex, drugs and rock and roll.

Almost Famous is as poignant a snapshot of sin and redemption as any of those that mark William's journey. Set against the ruthless search for adoration and the desperation of innocence, Crowe captures the true paradox of the era. The band members and the groupies—

affectionately termed "band-aides" because of their intense loyalty—grasp at the remains of their experiences, hoping it's enough to justify their shame and their happiness alike.

Fugit's cherub face does well to mask William's true sophistication, but also reminds the viewer of his

impressible age. Through the perfect blend of introspection and wonder, Fugit masterfully develops his character as the awe-struck moral center of that all-consuming fantasy world. Kate Hudson's portrayal of Penny Lane, the tour's most popular band-aide, also invokes the right combination of heart and whore. While the camera goes out of its way to illustrate her fragile angelic features with long one-shots, her true vulnerability is most obvious when she shares the screen with Russell. Played by Billy Crudup, Russell is Stillwater's guitarist and pretty boy. Arrogant with an emerging conscience, Crudup's Russell, the self-proclaimed "Golden God," softens as he sees his soul through William's young eyes.

The conflicting traits of saint and sinner are what give this film its decency. Without the distraction of a molded hero, the dissidence of the characters and life itself allow for true reflection and sincere filmmaking. Crowe masterfully pays tribute to the earnestness of his younger years and to the ardency of those who joined him.

For Rent: the moving Broadway musical

by Katie Galley
editorial page editor

Cross dressers, lesbians, gays and straights all make up the cast in the latest musical to hit Pennsylvania. No, it's not the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, it's *Rent*.

Rent is the 1996 Tony Award winning musical by Jonathan Larson. Based on the opera, *La Boheme* by Puccini, *Rent* tells the story of eight friends over one year of their lives in New York City.

The opening scene shows friends Mark and Roger hanging out in their grotesquely furnished apartment, with Mark shooting footage of Roger on his hand held 8mm camera. Quickly introducing the audience to the characters, we find out that Roger is infected with HIV and has been in rehab for the past year, just recently returning

to his apartment in Alphabet City in the East Village.

The phone rings, and Benny, former friend to Mark and Roger, informs them that the past year's rent is due on their apartment, or they will be evicted. The stage goes dark and then suddenly bursts alive with music and the cast spouts off about AIDS, having no money, past loves, living on the streets, cheating lovers and eating disorders--in no particular order.

Greed, corruption and selling-out are all undertones in this musical. However, the theme that weaves all the stories together is 'no day but today.' Can people find love after being burned? What if they have AIDS and have no hope for the future? Can people make a name for themselves in this world without giving into corporate sponsors? These are the questions that the friends

must deal with during the year.

Roger, the one with AIDS, can't deal with the world and wants to write one great song before he dies. Mark, his roommate, hides behind his camera making documentaries of the 'real world.' Then there's Maureen, ex-girlfriend of Mark, who left him for Joanne.

Mimi, another tenant in the building, likes Roger, but is a current drug addict with AIDS and can't love herself or let herself be loved. Benny, former friend of Mark and Roger, used to go out with Mimi and now wants to kick the entire crew out of their building to build a cyberarts studio.

Then there's Tom Collins, who also used to live with Mark and Roger, whose most recent job was teaching computer-age philosophy at NYU. He hooks up with Angel, a cross-dresser

with AIDS. The entire Alphabet City Avant Garde crew joins forces to keep Benny from tearing down the building, kicking out a tent-city of homeless persons.

Did everybody get all that? And while the gang is successful in deterring Benny from creating Cyberarts, they aren't successful in their personal lives. Loving, losing and leaving make up the rest of the year in the life of the friends.

Losing members of their family and selling out tear the friends apart throughout the year. In the end, after losing one friend and nearly losing another, they realize that love and friendship are the most important things in the world, and that there really is no day but today.

King reigns over e-books

by Erin McCarty
staff writer

After a near-fatal accident last June, horror master Steven King announced to the world that he would never write again. However, King's own horror experiences urged him to tap out yet another page-turner...or screen scroller.

King shocked the world by publishing his latest novel as a serial in e-book format and asked people to pay for it on the honor system. Surprisingly enough, he has seen a 75% return.

Now the writer has published a long-awaited book of memoirs, and his bizarre accident actually served as a concrete ending point.

In the book, King details his early fascination with writing, describing how he used to go to the movies, then sell novels to his classmates for a quarter. The gruesome also attracted him from an early age, and he clearly remembers the time his mother described seeing a man die after jumping off a roof.

The book also reveals the eerie details of the freak accident that nearly killed him last year. While walking down the road in Bangor, Maine, King was hit by a van. The van driver had apparently been distracted by his dog. In a strange twist of fate, Bryan Smith, the driver of the van, was found dead at his home this year on Stephen King's birthday, September 22.

Houston charged in drug case

by Clifford White
staff writer

Pop diva Whitney Houston is being charged by the Hawaii prosecutor on drug charges. She has until October 26 to turn herself in or she could face jail time.

In January, Houston was stopped at the Keahole-Kona International Airport during a routine inspection, at which time airport security discovered 15.2 grams of marijuana inside her bag. The security guards seized the bag and tried to detain the singer, but she had already boarded her flight to San Francisco. The private company that provided security for the airport who detained Houston was unable to arrest her, as they could only deal with airport security crimes. The police reportedly arrived 45 minutes after the flight had taken off.

In April, the Hawaiian prosecutor said that charges would not be pressed against Houston, but the matter would be turned over to the police for further

investigation. However, if any new evidence were to surface against her, prosecutors would take further action. It was reported by Hawaii County Vice Squad Lt. Robert Hickcox that there were fingerprints found on the marijuana container that was tested, but he would not say whose prints they were.

On September 22, deputy Prosecutor Mel Fujino said the Hawaii County Prosecutor's office has decided it will press charges against the pop star with third-degree promotion of a detrimental drug, which is punishable by 30 days jail time and a \$1,000 fine. Prosecutors will give her until October 26 to turn herself in. If she refuses, a warrant will be put out for her arrest.

The police uncovered enough new information about the superstar's drug use to convince prosecutors to file charges. Court TV has already applied for permission to cover the case.

Sic' Em FIDO

by Deanna Symoski



Running Numbers: How the MPAA is gambling with film ratings

A few months ago I was waiting in the lobby of a local movie theater when a mother and her son, approximately nine years old, approached the ticket booth. They looked up at their choices of films, when the young boy decided on *The Replacements*, rated PG-13. The mother said no, suggesting instead *Space Cowboys*. I thought about that for a moment, realizing the mother had proposed a film with the same rating as the first. She had seen neither, but apparently trusted that senior citizens were somehow less PG-13 than Gen-Xers. It was just a fleeting thought, and after a moment I paid it no more attention. But with the tongue-lashing and all-out threats that Hollywood has recently gotten about its test-screening procedures, the scene occurred to me again, as it perfectly illustrates the absurdity of the current film ratings system.

Undoubtedly, this latest attack by the government on Hollywood will provoke some changes, one of which might very well be the complete overhaul of the way the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) rates films. It's the change that critics feel is long overdue, and given the arbitrary nature of the system, one that may save unsuspecting parents from gambling with the viewing habits of their kids.

The difference between PG-13 and R is a subtle one, as is the fine line between R and NC-17. But it's not what you see that determines a rating, it's the number of times you see it. It's a numbers game that the board is really playing. In fact, the same movie, with the same plot, is subject to all three of these ratings depending upon how many times it employs the use of certain words or actions. For example, *Dr. Dolittle* got tagged with a PG-13 rating for language. Yes it was explicit, but that wasn't the problem. It was the amount of explicit language that sent ratings board members into a tizzy. Forget that any curse words were used in a child-friendly film, what mattered was the number of times they were used.

Obviously, board members are missing the point. Ratings were established to help parents understand the content of films. All the board currently does, however, is rate the amount of content that is hardly acceptable for PG and PG-13 rated films in the first place, all but forgetting the inherent insidiousness of these phrases or actions, the board increasingly chooses to focus on the number of times the phrase or action occurs. The problem that no one seems to realize is that if a word was troubling 36 times, it will be no less troubling at number 35.

Such arbitrary standards determine the line between R and NC-17 as well. An R rating means that children may attend the film with a parent or guardian, but an NC-17 sticker will not admit children under 17 despite the accompaniment of an adult. So what's the difference?

Board members felt parents would not condone the original versions of films like *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* or *Two Guys and a Girl*, so they sent the films back to the chopping board. After returning numerous times, the films were both tagged with R-ratings (instead of the original NC-17). What they changed wasn't content. It was, of course, the amount of it.

South Park came before the ratings board six times before it was given the less severe rating. Among changes was a sentence using "God" and two expletives, which was worth NC-17. Changed to "God" and one expletive—well, that's a measly R. The Heather Graham/Robert Downey Jr. film saw requests for similar changes during its 14 submissions to the board. In the film's only sex scene, Graham was restricted to moving her arm up and down three times instead of six, while Downey could only be on his knees three seconds instead of seven.

Again, the message of the content was ignored and the focus became the amount of times the message was sent. Sex is sex, whether a child is allowed to see seven seconds of it or only three. The impression has already been made. And if using "God" and two expletives is unsuitable, shouldn't using "God" and one expletive be just as inappropriate? If the board feels that numbers should define the viewing habits of children, it must seriously reconsider its own standards.

New Releases

Movies

15 Minutes

Digimon: The Movie

Get Carter

Imposter

Meet the Parents
10/6

* release date is 10/10

Video*

N'sync
Music Video

Jurassic Park
Collector's Edition

The Lost World
Collector's Edition

Music*

Wallflowers
Breach

Orgy
Vapor Transmission

DVD*

N'sync
Music Video

Jurassic Park
Collector's Edition

The Lost World
Collector's Edition

Love and Basketball

