



**KALIFORNIA**  
Director: Dominic Sena  
(Columbia Tristar)

My big screen viewing of this film had something of a shadow cast over it by the awesome *Natural Born Killers*, which I viewed just days earlier. Both films share the same subject (serial killing) and co-star (Juliette Lewis), and, although the similarities end there, one can barely view this, the inferior work, without thinking of the other. Impossibly intellectual couple Brian (if you reverse two letters in his name it spells Brain, as Pitt's character points out) and Carrie embark on a road tour of American serial killing sites, collecting material for a book they are making. Brian (David Duchovny) decides they should take on board a couple of extra passengers to share the petrol costs with. Carrie (Michelle Forbes) thinks it's a bad idea — but then, she thinks just about everything's a bad idea. She is an annoying woman with a majorly irritating haircut.

As it turns out, Brian and Carrie hit the serial killing jackpot with the hick couple they get to ride with them. Early (Brad Pitt) is a bona fide serial killer. His girlfriend Adele (another scene stealing turn from Lewis) is a bona fide eejit, who literally lets him get away with murder. Early makes disgusting sounds with the snot in the back of his throat and plays with his feet at the diner table. Understandably, the car gets very small, very fast.

Adele eventually spills the beans about Early's chequered past. Carrie gets way mad and does the "it's him or me" routine. Brian picks her, and the shit hits the fan big time when he tries to give Early and Adele the kiss off.

Pitt makes a very scary murderer, especially after he has his pretty face fucked up. Things get gory and bleak. Even more bleak is Brian's constant, moralising voice-over. He leaves no conclusion to our own intelligence, and the goodie and baddie roles are as clear cut as can be. Serial killers are bad, nuclear testing sites are creepy, and even writers can get things wrong sometimes. This is one for diehard Lewis and Pitt fans only. I seriously doubt it will make Forbes into a household name. Speaking of stickability, can anyone remember David Duchovny's transvestite detective in *Twin Peaks*? Refresh my memory, on the back of an envelope, please!

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

**The Good Son**  
Director: Joseph Ruben  
(Roadshow)

This is a very standard horrifying thriller type movie, with a strong Hollywood feel. Funny that. It has beautiful child actors (Macaulay Culkin, Elijah Wood), beautiful parents, sweet Mommy, sensitive and strong Daddy, beautiful houses, and bea-u-ti-ful scenery — all accompanied with a typical, supposedly tear jerking soundtrack.

Mark (Elijah Wood's) Mom has just passed away. Mark's Dad is upset, but he also needs to go and close a business deal in Japan, so he and Mark "never need to be separated again" (presumably because Dad will make a killing and they'll be loaded forever).

So, for the two week duration, little Mark must go and stay with Dad's brother's family, which all looks swell. Mark seems to be doing okay. He even laughs when he and his cousin Henry (Maculay Culkin) smash a lobster leg up at the table together! Henry's Mom looks on approvingly, and whispers to Dad: "Everything's gonna be okay". But no, that is not so.

Henry turns out to be a right little blighter and tries to get Mark into all sorts of trouble. First, Henry shoots a dog with a bolt-shooting rifle he made. Then he coaxes Mark into helping him lift a stuffed man onto

a bridge. Before Mark can realise what's happening, Henry tosses the mannequin over the bridge with horrifying results! Later that day, Mark realises little Henry is "sick", and tells him so. Henry retaliates by saying he feels sorry for Mark because he doesn't know how to have fun. The next day Henry throws his little sister onto thin ice while they are skating, and you can guess what happens. Poor Mark is a nervous wreck by the film's end, and it's a real cliff hanger ending too.

SHIRLEY CHARLES

**In The Name Of The Father**  
Director: Jim Sheridan  
(CIC)

*In The Name Of The Father* tells the tale of a famous case which was (and, some would say, still is) "so insane that if you made it up no-one would believe it". This description comes from so-called 'Guildford Four' member Gerry Conlon (played here by Daniel Day-Lewis), whose book *Proved Innocent* provided the basis for this stunning film.

On October 5, 1974, the IRA carried out the fatal bombing of a Guildford pub, which whipped the English nation into an outraged frenzy. The police, desperate to quench the public's thirst for blood, arrested four hippies (Conlon and his friends Paul Hill, Paddy Armstrong and Carol Richardson) under the brand spanking new Prevention of Terrorism Act. The act gave police the right to hold suspected terrorists for up to seven days without charging them. During this time, the police forcibly cajoled the group into signing confessions. In addition, an assortment of "ringleader" Conlon's relatives were arrested and charged for a series of IRA "support network" related crimes.

The public shared the triumph of the "decorated officers", who had lied their way through the weeks of court hearings which found the innocent guilty. Conlon received the maximum incarceration period of 30 years. It was 15 years before the truth came out — too late for Conlon's father and cell-mate Guiseppe (Pete Postlewaite), who died waiting for it to be uncovered.

The narrative is recounted on a tape Conlon made for the lawyer (Emma Thompson) handling the appeal. As their campaign goes public, the nation change their tune and begin 'free the Four' protests. The everyday people, who were turned into villains, are transformed into heroes, as their case goes head to head with the British legal system and police force.

The interrogation scenes and court cases are intense and frightening. A normal reaction when faced with blatant stupidity is laughter, but the consequences of these acts make for angry and despairing chuckles indeed. Splendid performances across the board make *In The Name Of The Father* compelling viewing. An excellent soundtrack (featuring a glut of 70s hits and framed by a pair of stellar tracks from Bono and Sinéad O'Connor) are the icing on this bitter cake.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

**BACKBEAT**  
Director: Eion Softly  
(Columbia)

John Lennon had a best friend in the early 60s called Stuart Sutcliffe (Stephen Dorff). John and Stuart decided to make a band, so they made the Beatles. Easy.

*Backbeat* takes place mainly around the time the Beatles took their first journey to Hamburg in 1960, with original drummer Pete Best and Stuart playing bass. It focuses mainly on Stuart's involvement (or non-involvement) with the band, with John, and his relationship with German photographer Astrid Kircher (Sheryl Lee, who we last saw dead in *Twin Peaks*).

Stuart was initially an artist, and sold his first painting for 50 quid, which he brought a bass guitar with. He was doing well with his

art, but decided to give it up for a bit to go to Hamburg with the Beatles.

The band played consecutive nights in a sleazy German bar, occasionally sharing the stage with strippers. The crowd consisted mostly of rowdy piss heads and a few token German grrlies. One night, an arty sort of man named Klaus comes to see them. He likes them. He has friends in high places. He gets them a little recording deal. He introduces them to his foxy girlfriend, Astrid. Stuart and Astrid start going around together. John initially doesn't like this. Astrid says it is because he is jealous of her (implying that he fancies Stuart). Astrid introduces Stuart to the underground bohemian scene. John says the bohemian scene is "all dick", and makes a huge fuss about it. Meanwhile, Stuart decides that painting and being with Astrid are more important than the band. Paul takes up the bass.

One night, after doing the limbo at an artsy affair, Stuart discovers he has rather a serious problem in the head, so to speak, and ultimately this rather ruins his relationship with Ingrid and his painting career. Sad really.

As far as the cast goes, young Stephen Dorff looks remarkably like the real Stuart, who was also very pretty. Sometimes his Liverpool accent is a little dodgy though. Ian Hart does a very feasible job as the feisty, young and rather obnoxious John Lennon. Terrific! Captivating! Stunning! A slice of Beatlemania that we didn't get to see... yes, it was quite good.

SHIRLEY CHARLES

**LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE**  
Director: Alfonso Arau  
(Columbia Tristar)

Based on Laura Esquivel's novel-with-recipes, *Like Water For Chocolate* is a romantic family epic, flavoured with enough good cooking and mysticism to turn it into something truly different.

Tita (Lumi Cavazos) is born the youngest of three daughters, in a family headed by a fearfully domineering matriarch. Tradition forbids her to marry, deeming she take care of her mother until she dies. Love, however, makes no concessions for Tito's family status, and turns up in the form of Pedro (*Cinema Paradiso*'s Marco Leonardi). His request for permission to marry Tito is turned down by her mother, who offers her daughter Rosaura instead. The film turns on Pedro's desperate decision to accept this offer, in order to be close to Tita. The farcical newlyweds will live with Tita and her mother.

Unable to externalise her love for Pedro, Tita pours it all into her cooking, making her the envy of all who eat it (usually). The emotion invested in the meals is sometimes transferred to those who eat them. This happens at the wedding of Pedro and Rosaura, with hilarious, bile inducing results, lending a comic turn to an otherwise heartbreaking event.

For two decades, Tita and Pedro weather a tempest of unrequited passions and tragedy, with only brief stolen moments keeping their fires burning. In what is to prove an ironic speech from Tita's doctor (and later fiancé), we hear how such fires would burn all consumingly if a person ever met another who could light their whole box of matches at once. Without knowing it, he has described the agony and the ecstasy of Tita and Pedro's forbidden relationship. If the title doesn't say enough, let me recommend eating a large and exquisite meal before sitting down to this delectable slice of Mexican magic. Chances are your cooking won't measure up to Tita's, but this kind of cooking is so good, and its consequences so powerful, it's probably best partaken in from afar.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

**"THE FIRST  
UNMISSABLE  
FILM OF THE YEAR  
HAS ARRIVED"**

★★★★★ EMPIRE

No.1  
UK BOX - OFFICE  
SMASH HIT!

**"GRIPPING  
THE MOST THRILLING,  
CHILLING FILM SINCE**

**'SILENCE OF THE LAMBS' "**

DAILY MAIL

**"PURE  
ENTERTAINMENT...**

**A TOTALLY ABSORBING**

**THRILLER."**

NZ LISTENER

**"CRACKLES**

**WITH ELECTRIFYING ENERGY "**

Q MAGAZINE

**"BLACK  
COMEDY**

**WITH A VENGEANCE"**

TIME OUT

**Shallow  
grave**

R16

Contains Violence

ESSENTIAL FILMS

*What's a little murder between friends?*

**NOW SHOWING**