

2139 AD. With a vision straddling *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*, Nigel Phelps' sets provide the movie's raison d'être.

Comic strip origins makes for pretty basic characterisation, which means Sly Stallone of the granite face and bulging biceps is perfectly cast in the title role. Verbal wit is supplied by the frenetic Rob Schneider as the wisecracking Fergie, perfunctory love interest by Diane Lane as Judge Hershey.

Even with such enjoyable hokum as this, and an 80-million dollar budget to toy with, a few opportunities seem to have passed the film makers by. This sleazy soul couldn't help but think what slimy havoc the half hatched androids could have caused if they'd been used more in the finale of the film. And, taking a lead from Bette Davis, who more than once has done a turn as twin good/evil sisters, *Judge Dredd* could have been rather more unsettling if Armand Assante's evil Rico was also played by Stallone.

WILLIAM DART

## MUTE WITNESS

Director: Anthony Waller

A neat little movie this, with a wicked sense of humour and scant respect for any audiences with a fear of roller-coaster rides. From its teaser of an opening scene, *Mute Witness* is a virtuoso thriller with enough red herrings to keep the Norwegian shipping industry buoyant for a decade.

The premise is simple enough. Billy, a deaf-mute member of a film crew, lingers in a Moscow studio after the cast have gone off for the day, only to find herself witness to a real-life snuff movie. The ensuing film concerns her cat-and-mouse game with the villains, or those whom she perceives as the villains. (Being

Russia, one is never sure who is mafioso and who isn't.)

Anthony Waller (like our own Lee Tamahori) comes from the world of television advertising, and he has a lean film making style — everything counts. He plays the clichés with relish — from the noirish music (all sub-Rachmaninov piano and strings) to the obligatory sequence with the heroine taking a bath, draped in a towel in classic Hollywood starlet style.

An American production shot in Moscow around the time of the 1993 October Revolution, it has two Western leads (Evan Richards and Fay Ripley), with Russian Marina Sudina memorable as the beleaguered Billy. My favourite? Oleg Jankowskij as the sinister Larsen... unsettlingly reminiscent of a provincial arts administrator I once met in Samara...

WILLIAM DART

## AMATEUR

Director: Hal Hartley

Hartley's third feature, a self-styled 'meta-physical thriller', makes for 100 rather demanding minutes. True, there's a little more drive to it than Hartley showed on his previous feature, *Simple Men*, but *Amateur* will be a tough nut for the uninitiated.

In precis, the plot looks promisingly off beat — with a quartet comprising an ex-nun who's trying to keep body and soul together writing porn novels (Isabelle Huppert) an amnesiac hood (Martin Donovan), a psychotic accountant (Damian Young, in what is by far the liveliest performance of the movie) and a put-upon porn star (Elina Lowensohn, registering as a cross between Louise Brooks and Uma Thurman).

For me it's the over intellectualising that deals *Amateur* its deathblow. Quentin Tarantino's scripts are self-conscious, but they



Judge Dredd

have style and life; Hartley's words never escape from the page. Quips like: "How can you be a nymphomaniac and have sex? I'm choosy," end up provoking a smile rather than a laugh, not helped by the low energy acting Hartley obviously favours.

In the final convent play out (for a while there I was worried we might be into a rather arcane *Sister Act 3*) Donovan and Huppert deliver their dialogue, laborious sentence by laborious sentence, with interminable pauses between. Yet elsewhere Hartley fires images of panic and

coercion at you — people are harassed out of cafes and cinemas; Young, in a wonderful, ever-so-human moment, stuffs his face with a purloined pizza. Would that Hartley's characters showed more such human desires and passions.

Hartley speaks of 'exploitation' as one of the themes of his film... of the actors, the technicians, the producers and production staff. Perhaps the audience's patience could be added to the list.

WILLIAM DART



Brad Pitt goes serial killer hunting in *Seven*, coming soon.



Mad Love opens Oct 20.



Johnny Depp's *Don Juan De Marco* opens Oct 27.

# Reel News

**Juliette Lewis** is set to star in **Quentin Tarantino's** next film ... **Deborah Harry** and **Adam Ant** appear in the upcoming pop industry parody *Drop Dead Rock*. **Harry** also co-stars in *Heavy*, alongside **Liv Tyler**, **Shelley Winters** and **Evan Dando** ... **Uma Thurman** stars alongside **Matt Dillon** and **Timothy Hutton** in the contemporary romantic comedy *Beautiful Girls* ... **Quentin Tarantino** and *Pulp Fiction* producer **Lawrence Bender** have joined forces again to form two new companies. The first, A Band Apart Commercials, will produce (strangely enough) commercials, some directed by the big QT himself. The second, Rolling Thunder, is an independent feature division of Miramax, which will acquire and distribute up to four films of QT's choice each year. Hong Kong action film *Chung King Express* will be

Rolling Thunder's first film ... **Mike Newell** is working on the big Hollywood transition with *Donnie Brasco*. This true story stars **Johnny Depp** in the title role, as an FBI agent infiltrating the mafia. Depp is juggling his schedules to accommodate another lead role, in *Speed Racer* ... **Brad Pitt** will play the adopted son of an Irish-American cop involved with terrorists in *Devil's Own*, a 1940s climber kidnapped by the British, in the true story *Seven Days in Tibet*, and he and real-life co-star **Gwyneth Paltrow** team up with **Morgan Freeman** on the big screen in *Seven*, a suspense thriller about a serial killer who kills his victims in line with the seven deadly sins. Paltrow has also been working non-stop of late, having just completed *The Pallbearers* and *Moonlight and Valentino* ... **Emma Thompson** and

**Jonathan Pryce** co-star in the Cannes winner *Carrington*, which is directed by **Christopher Hampton** and based on the book *Lytton Strachey* by **Michael Holroyd** ... **Charlie Sheen** will star in *The Shadow of Conspiracy*, alongside **Linda Hamilton**, and the sci-fi thriller *Shockwave* ... **Eddie Murphy** will star in **Joel Silver's** *Sandblast*, and the (surprise, surprise) police comedy *Metro* ... **Will Smith** and **Bill Pullman** are set to co-star in the sci-fi thriller *Independence Day*. The story tells of an extra terrestrial plot to destroy Earth on July 4 ... *Glory* partners **Denzel Washington** and director **Ed Zwick** reunite for *Courage Under Fire* ... **Laurence Fishburne**, **Kenneth Branagh** and **Irene Jacob** star in a new film version of *Othello* ... **Gabriel Byrne**, **Kevin Pollack**, **Stephen Baldwin**, **Benicio del Toro** and **Kevin Spacey** co-star as the perpetrators of a bungled drug heist mess that needs sorting (sound familiar?) in *The Usual Suspects*. **Chaz Paliminteri** plays the lawman ... **Antonio Banderas**, **Sylvester**

**Stallone** and **Julianne Moore** do the action thing in *Assassins* ... **Julia Roberts**, **Kyra Sedgwick** and **Gena Rowlands** play women from three generations of a Southern horse raising family in *Something to Talk About*, the story of their relationships with the men in their lives. **Dennis Quaid** and **Robert Duvall** co-star ... the first ever fully computer generated feature film is on the way. Featuring the voices of **Tom Hanks** and **Tim Allen**, *Toy Story* tells the story of the battles of an old-fashioned, pull-string doll, and the latest action figure toy ... *Father of the Bride 2* stars **Steve Martin**, **Diane Keaton**, **Martin Short** and **Kimberley Williams** ... **Wim Wenders** is due to begin filming **Bono's** movie idea, *The Million Dollar Hotel*, in November ... the creators of *Delicatessen* have got the critics gushing all over again with *The City of Lost Children*. *Screen International* says it 'surpasses its predecessor for pure visual excitement and surreal abandon'. Now that would be something to see.