

ANNUAL LESBIAN MOVIE AWARDS



MULLHOLLAND DRIVE



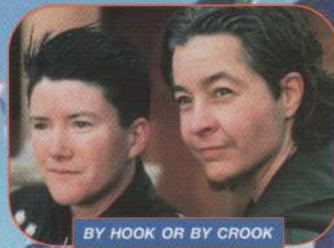
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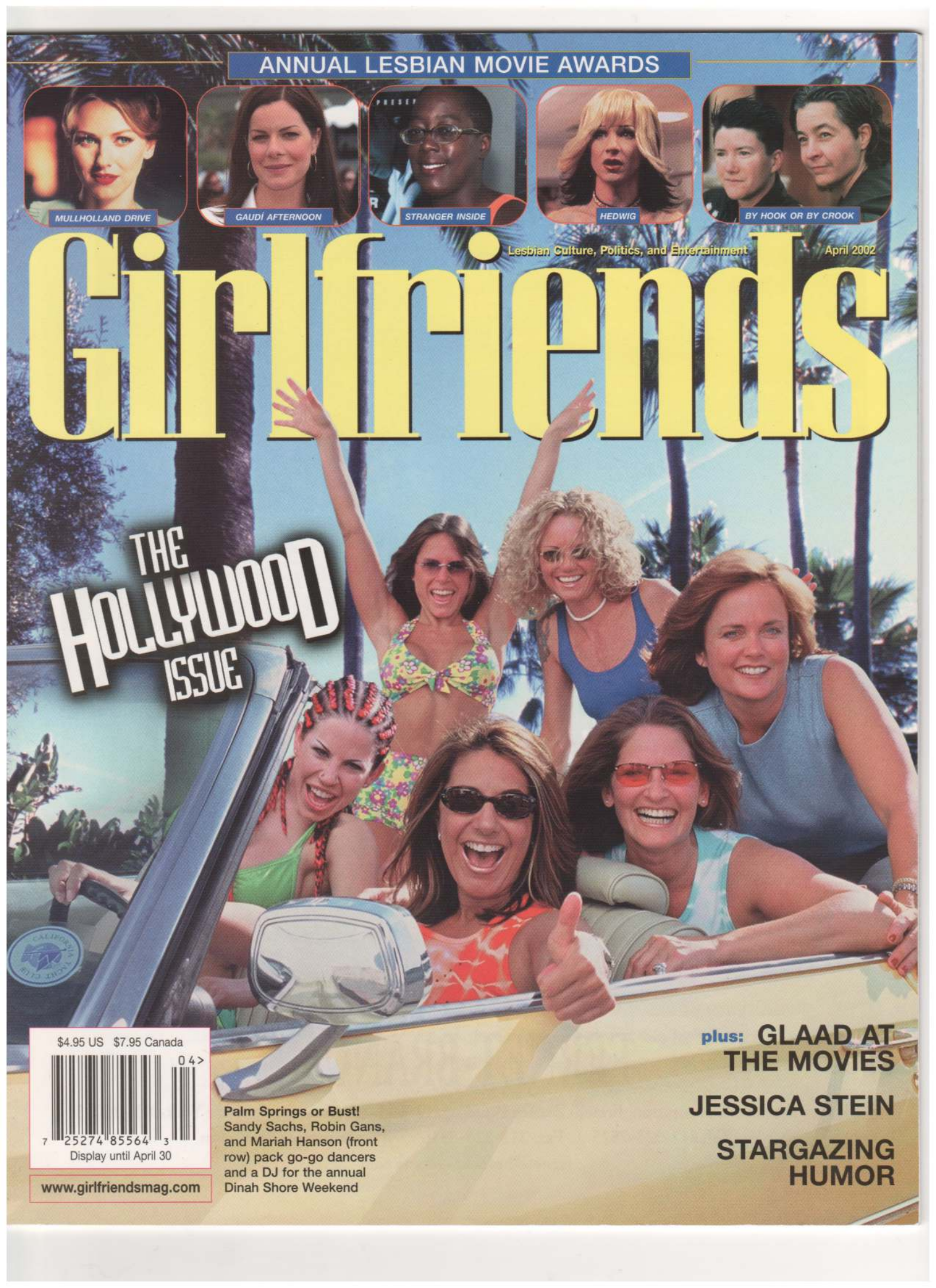
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Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

April 2002

# Girlfriends

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# Sex Drive

This time David Lynch gets his twisted narrative—and his lesbian characters—compellingly right.

by Candace Moore

The hottest lesbian film of the past year may also be the best-directed film of 2001. What's really surprising is that this film is David Lynch's copious, erotic, and tricky *Mulholland Drive*.

The amorphous trailer for Lynch's *chef-d'oeuvre*—which is still screening thanks to its Oscar viability—features the headlights of an inching limo beaming across a

## Mulholland Drive

David Lynch  
Studio Canal, 145 min.

nondescript road, matched with teasers hinting that this hardly-publicized feature

would center on sumptuous, fifties-style ingénues and amnesia. Before it hit the theaters, *Mulholland Drive* threatened to be more truant than *Lost Highway*, Lynch's 1997 confounded flop. But Mr. Lynch, a maestro of the odd (*Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet*), has given us something both richer and more puzzling than we ever expected.

Originally commissioned as a TV series to follow in the footsteps of Lynch's early-nineties phenomenon, *Twin Peaks*, *Mulholland Drive* was refused by ABC upon first viewing. Trusting the value of his own work, Lynch secured the backing of French film company Studio Canal, shot added scenes, and reshaped the material into a motion picture. After some initial critical murmuring, *Mulholland Drive* has since garnered deserved acclaim in the form of the New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Picture, a Golden Globe nomination for Best Dramatic Motion Picture, and quite a bit of Oscar buzz.

At first, the movie feigns the conventional narrative structure of a

hard-boiled noir in the likes of *Double Indemnity* or *Touch of Evil*. It engrossingly centers on three characters: Betty (versatile Naomi Watts), an innocent, squeaky-clean, out-of-town blonde with acting ambition; Rita (Laura Harring), a self-named sultry brunette who survives a car crash but suffers from amnesia, only to stumble into Betty's aunt's apartment and later, Betty's arms; and Adam (Justin Theroux), a successful, self-satisfied young director manipulated by mysterious, powerful forces.

Within a dream logic dicier than that of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, *Mulholland Drive* incorporates the themes of murder, love, lust, success, failure, and the deep-seated, mob-like sociopathology of Hollywood. The film morphs into a second level, a harsher reality in which Betty is Diane, a shaggy, distraught woman who fights to keep her ambitious lover Camilla (previously Rita) from marrying the rich slimeball Adam. The film fractures into two disparate realities that, in their haunting similarity, gorgeously illustrate the emotive magnets that drive the characters. The opening scenes and the final conclusion of the film reference back and influence each other in a vexing cause-and-effect relationship that can't be solved.

Within his connect-the-dots plot, Lynch brilliantly relies upon basic Aristotelian principles of drama, stylistically exaggerated, in order to maintain suspense. Often a moment of action is suspended for a particularly long time on screen, accumulating audience anticipation.

What we do sense from the beginning of the narrative is the verging-on-sexual connection between Betty and Rita. When it explodes, and Rita tucks her naked, buxom body into Betty's bed, we are poised for trickery. Yet the two supposed strangers gravitate to each other out of a heat that is palpable off-screen. Some may accuse Lynch of using girl-on-girl sexuality for the shock value alone. Yet it is not often that a non-dyke-made, widely released film can have its lesbian



Harring and Watts, destined for heat

audience members scootching down in their theater seats from sudden wetness after a brief love scene. When Betty and Rita recognize their longing for each other, stroke each other's breasts, and voluptuously kiss, a cinematic moment feels sprung. Straight and gay audiences alike take a deep breath, as they know what is coming, the complications that sex will introduce to infatuation, something not unlike love. Grade: **A-**

Candace Moore, co-editor of the small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in L.A.

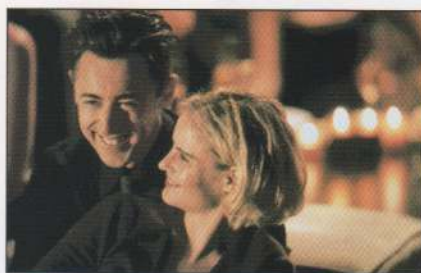


# Queering La-la Land

These videos turn the camera on the image factory that made them.

by Candace Moore

When **Hollywood** captures *itself* on celluloid—a self-reflexive gesture with a long history—often the portrait is not so sweet. In *The Anniversary Party*, Jennifer Jason Leigh and openly-omnisexual Alan Cumming portray Sally and openly-bisexual Joe, a Hollywood-style couple who invite an all-star-casted panoply of Industry friends (including Gwyneth



Cumming and Leigh's *Anniversary* tag-team

## The Anniversary Party

Alan Cumming,  
Jennifer Jason Leigh  
Fine Line Features, 2001

Paltrow, Kevin Kline, Parker Posey, and John C. Reilly) to celebrate their marriage-on-the-rocks pool-side. Although Leigh and Cumming are first-rate, their tag-team directorial debut is distracting. The new DVD version, however, has the potential to be a semi-thoughtful critique on the dangers of an easy-living, hedonistic lifestyle. Grade: **B**

## Bowfinger (MCA/Universal Pictures, 1999)

When out-of-work producer Bobby Bowfinger (Steve Martin) reads the screenplay for *Independence Day* knockoff "Chubby Rain," he's so sure it's "GO picture" material, he coerces a cast of struggling eccentrics to chase paranoid action star Kit Ramsey (Eddie Murphy) around L.A. with a camera, thereby incorporating Kit's frightened, fleeing image into the alien flick without his consent. Martin's hilarious anti-valentine to both Hollywood and his ex, Anne Heche, includes Heather Graham as the flirty Daisy (read: Anne), who pridefully introduces a new female lover, proclaiming in bubbles, "Sara is one of the most powerful lesbians in Hollywood!" Martin even takes a swipe at Scientology. Is nothing sacred? Grade: **B+**

## Dancing at the Blue Iguana (Lions Gate Films, 2000)

Written mostly during improv sessions by its ensemble cast, this portrayal of the lives of strippers at a seedy L.A. club is as unapologetic as Paul Thomas Anderson's 1997 film about the porn industry, *Boogie Nights*. In fact, the film allows us to view the action at the Blue Iguana from various identity positions—as an erotic dancer, as a club manager, and as a patron. Fine acting by Darryl Hannah, as Angel, a sweet, slightly ditzy would-be mom and Jennifer Tilly as a fierce dominatrix. Grade: **B+**

## Beyond the Valley of the Dolls (20th Century Fox, 1970)

This cult classic set in the Hollywood party scene of the late sixties was team-written by Russ Meyer and cinematic thumb-wielder Roger Ebert. Truly something to behold, *Beyond* is a stoned psychedelia of raunchy, nude, rich kids who mix angst, peyote, and superwoman outfits with their free love. As is customary with Meyer, we are offered up some hot lesbian action. But when the two women—who are portrayed as genuinely in love—get brutally gunned down, a summary voice-over seems to suggest they deserved it. What the fuck? Grade: **C-**

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# A Kinder, Gentler Hollywood?

Back in 1987, I stood in a packed auditorium to hear gay journalist Michelangelo Signorile speak. He implored the room full of queer student activists to get with the picture, so to speak: "I don't think we should be marching on Washington," he said. "We should be marching on Hollywood."

In those days, when screens were splashed with lesbian killers and suicides, I was very impressed by his exhortation. Signorile was drawing our attention to the enormous power of TV and motion pictures to shape the way America thinks about homosexuality—not to mention the way we define ourselves.

So when I assigned "GLAAD Tidings" (page 12) to contributing writer Naomi Graychase, I told her to make sure to cover the mission statement of

the Gay and Lesbian Advocates Against Defamation. Does the watchdog group operate differently now that Hollywood is so much friendlier to lesbian content? In a world where Ellen DeGeneres can come out, *Boys Don't Cry* can get an Oscar, *Mulholland Drive* can rake in a critics' award, and GLAAD itself can host star-studded events, is Hollywood really still our enemy?

My mind was made up, in the end, by the results of *Girlfriends'* annual lesbian movie awards. Because I'd been able to see the slick *Gaudi Afternoon* and *Julie Johnson*—which feature talent like Judy Davis, Courtney Love, and Lili

Taylor—at our local gay film fest, I thought for sure these two films would sweep the 2002 Sapphos. But as our Assistant Editor Jen Phillips began to solicit judges for nominations, a different scenario emerged. In the end, Cheryl Dunye's wonderful *Stranger Inside* snapped up Best Picture, Best Director, and a Lifetime Achievement award for Dunye.

I think my faves spun out because they had the bravery to get made, but not the power to get distributed. (*Stranger Inside*, although also independently produced, got screened on HBO last year.) And suddenly I realized that—as you will see in Judith Halberstam's interview with the dykes behind *By Hook or by Crook*—a distribution deal is everything. As long as a lesbian film can't get one, I concluded, Hollywood is still not our friend.

Enjoy the rest of our special Hollywood issue, and see you at both the ticket and the picket lines.



Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

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# Girlfriends

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