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July 2002

Girlfriends

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'Tis *Human* to Err

A bearded lady inspires *Human Nature's* disturbing look at sexuality.

by Candace Moore

According to Charles Darwin,

humanity lost much of its protective body hair thanks to sexual selection. In laywoman's terms, he meant that men got off more by looking at mates with bare skin and chose them over furrer competitors. In the tongue-in-cheek *Human Nature*, screenwriter Charlie Kaufman's latest rat's nest of neuroses, Patricia Arquette plays the evolutionary throwback Lila, a particularly hirsute woman who first discovers a woolly patch of hair on her chest during puberty. By adulthood she is covered in an ashy blond down, complete with beard.

Unfulfilled by life as a circus freak show and pining to be loved, Lila seeks refuge in the forest. She tears off her civilian garb and lives wild and wet in the squirrely, prickly, Edenic outdoors, where the animals accept her for who she is. Arquette's naked, full-breasted foraging recalls a fuzzy Daryl Hannah circa *Clan of the Cave*

Human Nature
Dir. Michel Gondry
Fine Line Features, 92 min.

Bear. (French director Michel Gondry, best known in the U.S. as the surreal mastermind behind Bjork's music videos, polishes these scenes to a sarcastic, bright sheen.) Reclusive Lila publishes some Waldenesque memoirs entitled *Fuck Humanity*, which garner her wealth and popularity as a nature writer, and allow her to afford extensive electrolysis. She then returns to city life, hoping to land a man.

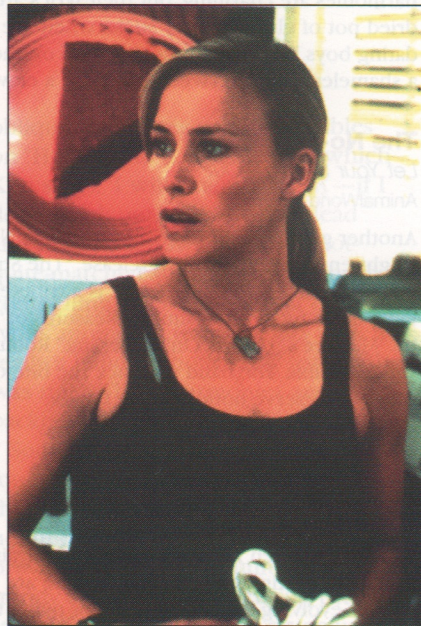
Newly preened, the idealist courts an obsessive-compulsive scientist, Nathan Bronfman (Tim Robbins), who also happens to be a virgin with a microscopic penis. Together they venture on a romantic hike and

discover a feral man, played by the hilarious, eyebrow-perching Rhys Ifans (*Notting Hill's* Spike), who has been coached into believing he is an ape. Excited, Dr. Bronfman drags the naked savage-of-sorts into his lab and uses shock therapy to mold "Puff" (as Nathan's slutty assistant dubs him) into a "civilized" human being.

Except for one little problem: Puff can't contain his happy-to-see-you erection when greeted with any standing female mammal. After remarking on an exquisite meal in perfect, gentlemanly diction, he stands and athletically grinds his suited groin into a waitress's buttocks. Seeing the image of a bent-over model, he hopelessly thrusts into the screen. Dejected, he jacks off under the table at Hooters and spends his mad money on drinks, blowjobs, and stripjoints. And although Tim Robbins' character exudes a refined, ivy-league exterior, we soon learn his pent-up urges are equivalent to Puff's, if not more demented.

Human Nature treats men as horny hump-dogs who don the various markers of civilization, like reading Melville in sweater-vests, as a symbolic tent over their hard-ons. Straight women don't glow rosy through Gondry's pallidly lit periscope either. They either float off on silly, idealized tangents or make self-sacrificing concessions to men. They are cuckoo or co-opted. In this way the film is practically a treatise on the pros of homosexuality as a plausible alternative to a sick hormonal game. But not really.

Kaufman is hooked on the idea that deep down, man's pure desire is to



Patricia Arquette, sans fur, dates a virgin in *Human Nature*.

screw remorselessly everything that moves. In his eccentric hit *Being John Malkovich*, the straight men are once again rendered as slobbering, lust-struck lunatics. That film's only sympathetic love relationship develops between a woman (Cameron Diaz) who dons actor John Malkovich's body in order to make love to another woman (Catherine Keener).

One thing's for sure in *Human Nature*: both writer Kaufman and director Gondry seem to be having fun. Rife with tomfoolery, the film lampoons countless constructs and philosophies regarding nature, nurture, science, and passion. Unfortunately Kaufman doesn't leave us with one darn clue as to his take. Grade: **B**

Candace Moore, co-editor of the small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in Los Angeles

Out in the Outdoors

Lesbians are free to frolic in the great wide open.

by Candace Moore

The great outdoors reek of self-discovery. Something about the expanse of nature focuses the camera inward. In Percy Aldon's *Salmonberries*, k.d. lang plays Kotzebue, an orphan in a snow-blanketed Alaskan town who seeks her unknown heritage.

Salmonberries

Percy Aldon
Wolfe Video, 1991

The illiterate young laborer falls deeply in love with local librarian Roswitha (Rosel Zech, *Aimée & Jaguar*), an older woman who decorates with jars of berries. Shyly,

monosyllabically, Kotzebue brings her to an emotional breakthrough. The DVD includes a forty-five-minute retrospective interview with lang, who calls Alaska a place where "space is a deep drug." Grade: **B**



The new *Salmonberries* unthaws a fresh interview with lang.

Ghosts of Mars (Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2001) Perhaps director John Carpenter (*Halloween*) surmised that since so many campy sci-fi flicks are set on Mars, the red planet begs a crap-aesthetic. Whatever postmodern chuckle was intended, Pam Grier and Clea DuVall are wasted as lesbian colonialists in a badly written, blast-'em fest launched straight to DVD. In a futuristic matriarchal society, breeders are the minority and bands of humans explore and mine Martian frontiers. Everything's hunky-dory 'til extinct alien souls are unearthed, turning human hosts into self-piercing, rabies-eyed warriors who string up decapitated non-followers. It's *The Faculty* meets *Apocalypse Now* with women in uniform. Grade: **C-**

Big Eden

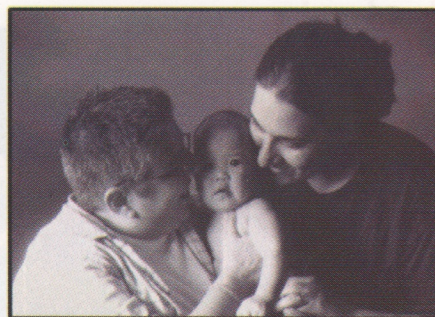
(Wolfe Video, 2000)

Big Eden, a fictional, slow-paced town in Montana's timber country, comes off as utopia in Thomas Bezucha's feel-good picture. Its beer-bellied inhabitants are so gay-supportive they practically run a dating service for thirty-something Henry Hart (Arye Gross of *Ellen*). A successful New York painter, Hart returns to his hometown to care for his stroke-prone grandfather. A bad cook, Hart solicits a local widow to whip up meals, and quiet Native American shop-owner Pike (Eric Schweig), who harbors a crush on the artist, delivers them. Pike dotingly supplants the widow's fatty food with healthy gourmet meals. You'll root for this love story right along with the locals. Grade: **B**

Desert Hearts

(Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1985)


A veritable lesbian classic, Donna Deitch's filmic reworking of Jane Rule's novel was possibly the first lesbian feature directed by a woman. Literature professor Vivian Bell (Helen Shaver) pursues a Reno divorce in 1959. Rooming at an outskirts ranch that serves as a halfway house for in-limbo divorcées, the upper-class intellectual is slowly seduced by the ranch-owner's twenty-five-year-old step-daughter, Cay (Patricia Charbonneau). They tumble together in a humid, realistically awkward sex scene. A self-assured dyke, Cay soothes Vivian's anxieties and helps her be proud of true love. Grade: **A-**




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Work It Out

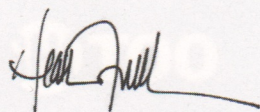
I bought Pink's *Missundaztood* as a Christmas present for my wife, Alice. Unfortunately, Alice leans more in the Britney direction (sometimes so far that I have to remind her we're married). But instead of replacing *Missundaztood* with *Now That's What I Call Music 7*, I decided to keep it. Thank goodness. It's the first true album I've listened to in a long time: the songs are organized around a coherent theme, each one is consistently good, and yet every tune has its own, distinct sound. "Get This Party Started" makes me want to dance and "Dear Diary" makes me want to—well—Alice will have to take off her headphones for that.

So I wasn't surprised to find out that Pink, although she passed on an interview with *Girlfriends* ("she's getting ready to tour," said her publicist), is a friend of the friends of Dorothy. In fact, Pink idolizes Linda Perry, the creative force behind the short-lived but super-talented lesbian band 4 Non Blondes. As Lori Selke will inform you in "Hip-Hop's Bad Girls" (page 12), Pink cold-called Perry, and the two spent a hothouse month together germinating *Missundaztood*. (Aerosmith's Steven Tyler described Pink as "the next Janis Joplin"; as if she inherited the great sixties bisexual's spirit.)

We've got music on the cover, but another kind of recreation inside. Sports have always been an integral part of lesbian culture; for many of us, the local softball league was our only way of meeting other dykes besides the bars. (I personally was a softball wife; I got in on the action by making sandwiches for practice.) In return, lesbians have always

been an integral part of women's sports: from Babe Didrikson to Martina Navratilova, women-who-love-women have been powerful advocates for the legitimacy of female athleticism.

For these reasons, *Girlfriends* dedicates nearly a whole issue every year to the topic of sports. This time, Naomi Graychase updates us on pro women's football's struggle for money, league coherence, and official support for its lesbian players. (Considering that these women are nicknamed "The A-Train" and "The Undertaker," you'd think they'd get some respect!) Also, don't miss Jenny Eggers's report on this year's Gay Games in Sydney. It's an inspiring story about the importance of sports to lesbian self-esteem, physical health, and political advancement. Enjoy.



Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief



BEVERLY PAET

Ice Hockey queen Karen McAfee (right) tries semi-successfully to bring out the jock in me.

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