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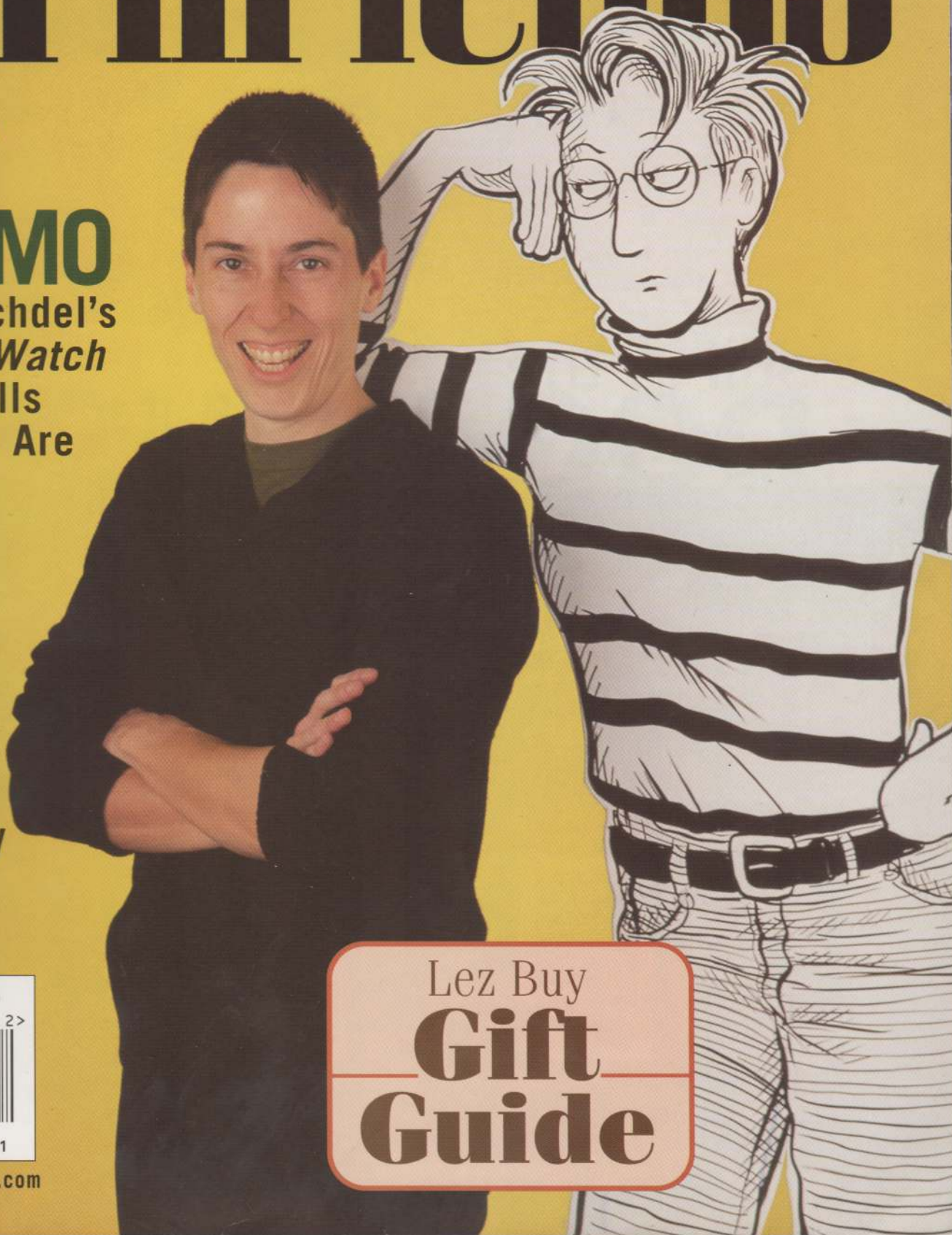
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video

Girl World

Emotions run high when girls run in packs.

BY CANDACE MOORE

Lesbian separatist dreams of utopia never factor in emotional complications, but something special happens in woman-only space. Hollywood has practically made a genre out of the female colony film. The following four features get to play it straight while cashing in on the latent lesbian subtext, which occasionally turns blatant.

The Wild Party

(Hollywood's Attic, 1929)

The Hard Boiled Maidens (HBM) are a group of college girls who "jazz around glorying in sham freedom" and frequent seedy bars. Clara Bow, the consummate 1920s flapper and "It" girl, plays their carefree leader, Stella Aimes, who champions Hard Boiled Virtuosity. Although dyke director Dorothy Arzner's first talkie centers on Stella's desperate attempts to break taboos with professor Gil Gilmore (Fredric March), Stella is obviously stuck on nerdy dormmate Helen. When Helen gazes up from her typewriter to say, "I haven't any time for men," Stella plunks herself down in her lap. At an all-night party, Stella wanders the beach jealously in search of her. Upon finding her with a man, Stella admits, "I'm rotten. But you see: I love Helen too." This movie is so racy and divinely pretty, you'll put up with the heterosexual schmaltz. Grade: **A**

things go haywire. Mary pursues a divorce in Reno and ends up at a dudette ranch with an odd mix of divorcées-to-be. The catty society queen Sylvia Fowler (Rosalind Russell) and Miriam (Paulette Goddard), who has stolen Sylvia's husband, have a delicious hair-pulling, flesh-baring, roll-in-the-dirt catfight. A sublime fashion show (with a multitude of drool-worthy women in Adrian creations) acts like the musical interlude at a boxing match, providing relief from Claire Boothe Luce's biting dialogue. With a cast of eight wonderful actresses—including Joan Fontaine, Marjorie Main, and Mary Boland—this film is a glamorous homage to the unabashed homoeroticism of straight women's rituals. Grade: **A+**



Gangleader Angelina Jolie channelling James Dean

Chantilly Lace

(Showtime, 1993)

This Showtime movie about seven women of various ages meeting periodically at a vacation house to mawl about their lives was derived from improvisations—and it shows. Like an acting workshop, *Chantilly Lace* has its moments of grit, but the lack of dramatic infrastructure is sometimes painfully evident. If you can bear the overshooting-for-an-Oscar performances, you'll sense a nice sexual tension between post-adolescent Elizabeth (Ally Sheedy) and artsy Ann (Martha Plimpton). Elizabeth, a softer dyke than Sheedy's arresting Lucy in *High Art* (1998), has an awkwardly true coming-out scene. Lindsay Crouse, Jill Eikenberry, Talia Shire, Helen Slater, and JoBeth Williams also star. Grade: **C**

The Women

(MGM/UA Home Video, 1939)

The hot new nail polish in this George Cukor comedy classic is Jungle Red, and all the hoity-toity ladies are rushing to the beauty salon. When a chatty manicurist unwittingly spills the beans to Mary Hayes (Norma Shearer) about Mr. Hayes's affair with low-class Crystal (Joan Crawford),

Foxfire

(Rysheer Entertainment, 1996)

Angelina Jolie plays Legs, the drifter from out of town who cements a high-school girl gang. She first appears cowboy style: in a rear view from the boots up. As she trounces through the halls, a guard addresses her as "Young man." Throw all your lip-inflation criticisms of Jolie away, in *Foxfire* she's yummy—some unbridled, doe-eyed, creamy kind of James Dean. Legs rallies the teenagers to battle a sexually abusive biology teacher, convincing them they've got to fight injustices to women. They beat him up and are bonded forever. The "girls who run with foxes" (the principal's epithet) drink, smoke pot, squat an abandoned house, set the school on fire, get their breasts tattooed, tiptoe across bridges, and play with guns. Curly-haired Maddy (Hedy Burress), whose voice-overs open the film, falls hard for Legs, and to some degree, vice versa. There's more sizzle in a look between Maddy and Legs than a trillion sloppy *Girl, Interrupted* kisses. Grade: **B+**

Candace Moore, co-editor of small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in Berkeley.