

CHASTITY BONO • GAY GAMES GUIDE • JODIE FOSTER'S PANIC

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

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Girlfriends

2002 CAREER REPORT

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Panic Attack

Jodie Foster fights burglars and gender conventions in *Panic Room*.

by Candace Moore

Panic Room has been put through the big studio crank, and yet some quirky liveliness has escaped being ground to a pulp. A fine cast (headed by beloved Jodie Foster) saves the simpletonian thriller script from curdling in the actors' mouths. Despite its share of color-by-numbers filler, this action pic from pop-violence auteur David Fincher (*Fight Club*, *Se7en*) packs a few decent

twists and offers heaps of tomboy candy along the way.

Panic Room
Dir. David Fincher
Columbia Pictures, 108 min.

Jodie Foster is tough, pissed-off Meg Altman, a recent divorcee who is held hostage inside her just-out-of-escrow New York brownstone along with her cutely androgynous daughter Sarah (Kristen Stewart, a dead-ringer for a twelve-year-old Clea DuVall).

Previously owned by a paranoid, the house is outfitted with a *safe room*—a concealed space walled in by concrete, equipped with sliding bulletproof door, independent ventilation system, phone line, emergency provisions, and monitors projecting multiple surveillance feeds. When three burglars interrupt Meg and Sarah's sleep, the girls take solace in their built-in hideout, only to learn that the "panic room" may in fact be the least safe in the house.

What first appears to be a run-of-the-mill robbery turns gruesome as the thugs, Burnham (Forest Whitaker), Junior (Jared Leto), and Raoul (Dwight Yoakam), try to pry their way into the impenetrable box.

Meg initially hyperventilates, comparing their sealed fate to an Edgar Allen Poe story about live burial. But when the invaders start

pumping propane through the air vents, her concern for her daughter's life kicks her courage into gear. Meg tosses a fire blanket over Sarah and lights the incoming stream of gas aflame, torching Junior in an unmistakable message of war. Throughout the nerve-wracking siege that follows, she has Agent Clarice Starling's ingenuity, bolstered by the selfless kind of bravery that the protective urges of motherhood bring. She outsmarts and outruns her intruders to keep her child alive.

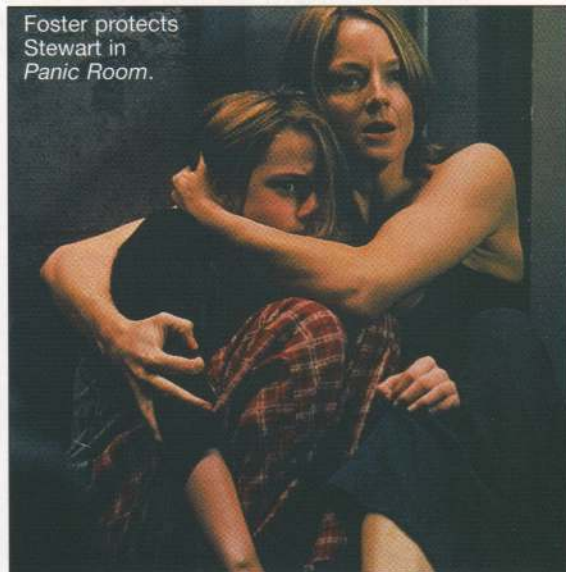
Looking small in oversized punk tees and sneakers, Kristen Stewart plays the un-accounted-for, diabetic kid who scooters around the place, encouraging her mom to use the word *fuck* when she needs it.

Meg doesn't need to dumb anything down for her bright, precocious daughter—they converse like peers when it counts. The cool-under-pressure young 'un even takes initiative, stashing her insulin needles away to jab sociopath Raoul at the necessary moment.

Consistently taking on the roles of intelligent, gritty women with staying power, Jodie Foster could easily be described as the Katherine Hepburn of her generation. A single mom by choice, Foster has been outed by the gay press innumerable times, and although the star has refused to publicly announce her sexuality, she has broadened the filmic catalog of images of femininity, with groundbreaking roles in *Foxes*, *Taxi Driver*, *The Accused*, and *Silence of the Lambs*, to name a few.

Foster's choice to take the part of Meg is no exception. This film challenges its own genre's conventions in a way few suspense films (*Aliens* being one) have done before. The mother-daughter team fends off three menacing thugs without help from the men in their

Foster protects Stewart in *Panic Room*.



lives. (Meg's ex-husband arrives on the scene, a possible male hero, only to be beaten lame by Raoul.)

Panic Room is at its root a mediocre thriller, designed to play at every cineplex for a handful of weeks and then blink out of short-fused attention spans. Although it's a treat to watch Jodie kicking burglar butt, the film's semi-feminist stance feels somewhat like a handout, as if it was gracefully endured in order to meet some quota. Grade: **B-**

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

Working Girls

These films feature pros in the world's oldest job.

by **Candace Moore**

Contrary to popular belief, the world's oldest profession can employ women with as much self-worth as sex appeal. That's not to say that Nicole Kidman isn't simply drool-inspiring as Satine, the unapologetic courtesan in Baz Luhrmann's vibrant, newfangled musical. A sonic pastiche of famous

rock lyrics and kinetic cinematography, this tragicomedy contains all the trappings of the traditional bohemian love story:

absinthe, a fatal case of consumption, circus eccentrics, explosive chorus numbers, a penniless suitor, and a guileful, sugar-daddy duke. Grade: **A**

Moulin Rouge!

Baz Luhrmann
20th Century Fox Films, 2001



Nicole Kidman plays hard-working courtesan Satine in *Moulin Rouge!*

Belle de Jour (Miramax Films, 1967)

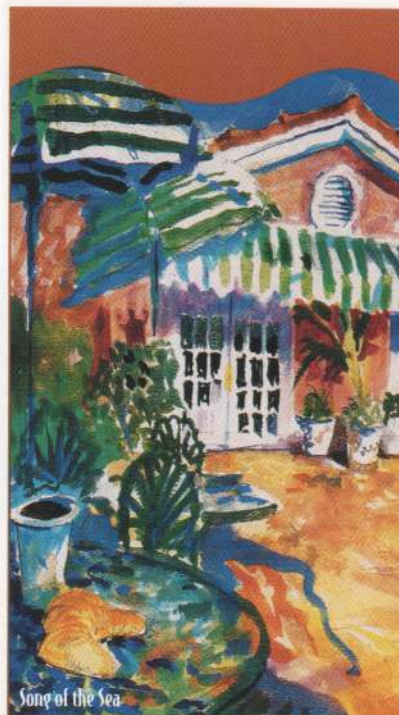
Catherine Deneuve plays Severine, an Yves Saint Laurent-clad French housewife who takes the day shift at a local whorehouse to quench her obsessive fantasies about submissive sex with strangers. Director Luis Buñuel's racy portrait of a woman addicted to danger is captivating but relies too heavily on pop-psychology. Severine's childhood molestation flashbacks are interjected sloppily and her perverse rationale comes off as too textbook. When she develops feelings for silver-toothed ruffian Marcel (Pierre Clementi), she simply kisses her Madame goodbye and runs home to hubby. Grade: **B**

Working Girls (Miramax Films, 1986)

Lizzie Borden's pioneering, albeit B-quality drama about Manhattan sex workers portrays the ordinary details of brothel life without moral or political stratagem. Instead, we have a utilitarian apartment, cheap erotic art, laundered towels, Trojan-runs to the pharmacy, computing tips, and the large wad of cash at the end of a long night. The workers are of differing sexualities, ethnicities, and education levels. (Lesbian main character Molly, played by Louise Smith, has two graduate degrees from Yale.) Between sessions they share a sisterhood, gossip about their greedy bitch of an owner, smoke joints, and praise their flexible work hours. Grade: **B-**

Live Nude Girls Unite! (First Run Features, 2000)

This passionate documentary about the first successful American unionization of exotic dancers follows comedienne Julia Query, a stripper at San Francisco's The Lusty Lady, as she and her co-workers fight for equal treatment, benefits, and better compensation. When the strippers find they're being screwed, they band together with some of the club's support staff, hire a labor representative, and force management to negotiate. Amateurish footage of Julia coming out to her mom about her sex work is laced into the protest, stripping, and contract-meeting sequences to create an engrossing, personally textured piece. Grade: **B-**



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Pride at Work

Thirty-three years ago this June, when the bulldykes and drag queens got harassed at the Stonewall Inn, they had to fight for their right to party. I'm sure this summer many of you will be following their example at Pride parades and festivals across the U.S. Have fun, feel proud, and remember their spirit!

As we were putting together our fourth annual Career Report, I was reminded how hard we've fought, too, for the right to work. The threat of being fired (or not hired in the first place) because we're gay is one of the most difficult realities faced by gay women. It's been *Girlfriends'* pleasure, therefore, to profile so many workplaces, from American Express to the

Putnamville Men's Correctional Facility, for their efforts (formal and informal) to provide good, safe jobs for their lesbian employees. What a difference, I'm sure, from 1969, when homosexuals were afraid to march for fear of being spotted and getting sacked.

I was also struck by a story told to me by Judy Dlugacz, president of Olivia Cruises and Resorts, when I interviewed her for our Workplace Awards story. Last August, she developed a brochure for Olivia's vacations, planning to mail it out in mid-September. It was ready to go to the printer, but then the planes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. "We had an emotional shock," says Dlugacz, "and a fiscal one, too. I called the office from Italy (where I was stranded) and said, 'Don't send that out!' I figured we'd have to cancel trips and redo the brochures. But when I got back we looked at them again. They emphasized, as Olivia's ads always do, *community and connection.*" Dlugacz decided

that the brochures were "absolutely relevant," and sure enough, while other travel firms were folding like beach chairs, in October Olivia had its highest-grossing month ever. "It was like this beacon came out from the community," she says. Olivia's new CEO Amy Errett, whom Dlugacz hired to take the thirty-year-old company to another level, agrees. "Our motive is different. We're in business because it's a heart thing, a passion thing, not just a financial one."

Now if that's not great business, lesbian or straight, I don't know what is. Enjoy the issue!



Me (top) working it with Career Report cocreators Jen Phillips and Amy Anderson.

Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

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