

This section features reviews of current and classic studio, independent, and foreign feature films. Each review includes pricing information, as well as running time, rating, subtitling information, and street dates for yet-to-be-released titles. Most titles reviewed here are widely available through most distributors.

- ★★★★ = Excellent
- ★★★ = Good
- ★★ = Fair
- ★ = Poor

## Current Films

### And Then I Go ★★★

Passion River, 99 min., not rated, DVD: \$24.95

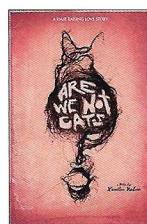
With school shootings an abominable feature of life in America, this can be a hard film to watch due to its ticking-time-bomb story of two middle-school outcasts whose profound desperation leads to plans of retaliation against the clique-filled school of bullies who victimize the pair every day. Yet the possibility of revenge killing isn't necessarily the point of director Vincent Grashaw's drama, which is based on Jim Shepard's 2004 novel *Project X*. Edwin (Arman Darbo) is a diminutive eighth-grader whose anxiety over classwork and social isolation is escalating. His best friend, Flake (Sawyer Barth), is in the same boat but is more aggressive in his retaliation—brief moments of victory that regularly earn him a beating from peers. Edwin receives no meaningful support at home from his parents (Melanie Lynskey, Justin Long), which leaves him all the more alone and confused. When Flake comes up with a horrifying plan and enlists a dubious Edwin, the question of how far the latter will truly go builds suspense. Grashaw brings energy and dark humor to the story, especially in scenes where the two leads end up in their school principal's office or in detention. And Darbo and Barth are compelling as the tormented kids winding up to some kind of life-changing action. Recommended. (T. Keogh)



### Are We Not Cats ★★1/2

MVD Visual, 78 min., not rated, DVD: \$14.99

After watching Xander Robin's debut feature, viewers will probably know more about trichophagia—a medical condition involving the obsessive eating of one's

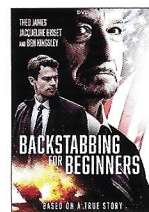


own hair—than they ever wanted to. Eli (Michael Patrick Nicholson), a pitiful fellow who has just been dumped by his girlfriend and fired from his job on a garbage truck, learns that his parents are selling their house and moving to Arizona. Before departing, his father gives Eli an old truck, which the latter then lives in and drives as a source of income. Following a hauling trip he meets Anya (Chelsea Lopez), who rips out her hair and eats it (and nothing else). Eli is attracted to Anya despite her odd habit—an unhealthy one, since hair cannot be coughed up (as cats do) or digested. Inevitably a medical crisis occurs, in which Eli must take drastic action (presented in a graphic manner that many will find hard to watch). Despite the oddity of their relationship, the tale of Eli and Anya has a strangely sweet undertone, and while the visuals related to Anya's physical condition are often unsettling, *Are We Not Cats* is a curiously touching—albeit decidedly unconventional—love story. A strong optional purchase. (F. Swietek)

### Backstabbing for Beginners ★★

Lionsgate, 108 min., R, DVD: \$19.99, Blu-ray: \$24.99

A real-life financial scandal at the United Nations forms the basis for this rather tame cinematic thriller. Filmmaker Per Fly's adaptation of Michael Soussan's titular 2008 memoir adds clichéd elements of romance and conspiracy to the author's account of his shocking revelations about the corruption of the U.N. Oil-for-Food program, which was established to provide basic life necessities while Iraq was enduring heavy sanctions following the First Gulf War. The resultant graft benefited Saddam Hussein, along with scores of private companies and U.N. officials. Here, Soussan is turned into Michael Sullivan (Theo James), a naive neophyte hired as assistant to Pasha (Ben Kingsley), the undersecretary in charge of the program. Sullivan quickly becomes aware that funds are being siphoned off, and learns—through information provided by Nashim (Belçim Bilgin), a beautiful translator in Baghdad—that Saddam is manipulating the aid to starve his bitterest rivals, the Kurds. In Baghdad, Sullivan's involvement with Nashim—which soon takes a romantic turn—puts them both in the crosshairs of the regime's most ruthless enforcers, which continues even after the couple makes their way back to the United States. Unfortunately, Fly's decision to add conventional genre elements to Soussan's important work as a whistleblower undermines the film's impact, although there is some compensation in Kingsley's cunningly extravagant if admittedly hammy turn (the otherwise pallid *Backstabbing* comes alive only when he is onscreen). Not a necessary purchase. (F. Swietek)



### Beauty and the Dogs

★★★

Oscilloscope, 100 min., in Arabic w/English subtitles, not rated, DVD: \$34.99, Blu-ray: \$39.99

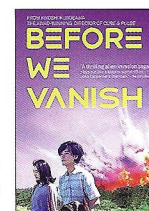


The misogyny infecting Tunisian society even after the political changes wrought by the Arab Spring is powerfully dramatized in Kaouther Ben Hania and Khaled Barsaoui's adaptation of a 2013 book by Meriem Ben Mohamed and Ava Djamshidi. The story focuses on Mariam (Mariam Al Ferjani), a college student raped by several policemen while out walking on the beach with Youssef (Ghanem Zrelli), a young man she meets at a dance party. The couple's efforts to get help, both at hospitals and police stations, are cavalierly or cruelly rebuffed, and after Youssef, the only man who has shown Mariam any sympathy, is taken away on suspicion of revolutionary activity, she is left entirely alone to deal with the authorities, who use every underhanded means to get her to drop her complaint. Her attackers even show up to threaten her again. Presented in nine chapters, each of which is shot in a single take, the film is deliberately elliptical, only gradually clearing up ambiguities left by abrupt transitions: in fact, what precisely happened to Mariam is not revealed until very near the semi-hopeful close. Although the narrative technique gives the picture a rather distant, chilly feel, *Beauty and the Dogs* still packs a strong dramatic punch, due in great measure to Al Ferjani's committed performance. A timely foreign drama, this is recommended. (F. Swietek)

### Before We Vanish

★★★

Virgil, 131 min., in Japanese w/English subtitles, R, DVD: \$19.99



The shadow of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* hovers over Japanese director Kiyoshi Kurosawa's stately, darkly comic tale of a stealthy plan by aliens to take over the Earth. To prepare for the invasion, the extraterrestrials send three scouts to commandeer the bodies of earthlings and learn about humankind. The possessed are Shinji (Ryûhei Matsuda), a young businessman; Akira (Yuri Tsunematsu), a teenage girl who may have murdered her parents before going missing; and Amano (Mahiro Takasugi), a cocky young man who is looking for Akira. The trio of alien/humans join up with two other people they persuade to become their guides: Narumi (Masami Nagasawa), Shinji's estranged wife, who is puzzled by her husband's changed, docile personality, and Sakurai (Hiroki Hasegawa), a freelance reporter at first interested in getting a scoop, who eventually becomes complicit in Akira and Amano's plans. Kurosawa's film has moments of action, especially Akira's