

around the world, with home-grown British films well represented. Eleanor Yule's *Blinded* was a Gothic Scots take on *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, boasting a performance of seething malice by Peter Mullan as a blind misogynist and Jodhi May on fragile form as his unhappy wife. Shane Meadows gave us *Dead Man's Shoes*, a dark Midlands-set revenge thriller, and Richard Eyre's *Stage Beauty*, a witty, intelligent romp that will forever be cursed by comparison to the inferior *Shakespeare in Love*.

It wasn't all quality on the British front though, as Richard Jobson unveiled his new film *The Purifiers*. Anyone who's ever seen *The Warriors* has seen *The Purifiers*. They just saw a superior version. The plot revolves around a multiracial Glasgow gang of pretty people (and the ugly hobbit from *The Lord Of The Rings*) trying to get back to their turf after refusing to join megalomaniac Nazi politician Kevin McKidd in his bid to take over the city. Really. In the film's press notes Jobson admits he was inspired to make the film by his son who wanted to see a film with 'lots of people beating each other up, chases on motorbikes — and some girls with big boobs.' Shame Jobson Jr didn't ask for a good script and some decent performances.

After the idiocy of *The Purifiers*, Zhang Yimou's stunning martial arts epic *Hero* was a welcome relief. Set in the distant past, it opens with a nameless hero being granted an audience with a paranoid king who wishes to know how the hero rid the kingdom of three fearsome regicidal assassins. But as the hero tells his tale, the king starts to suspect the hero may have a darker agenda of his own ... The film owes as much to *Rashomon* with its complex narrative structure and emphasis on the unreliability of its narrator as it does to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* whose lyrical fight scenes and gorgeous mise-en-scene it echoes. The film is a feast of colour and spectacle but its central romance between assassins Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung is heartbreaking and Jet Li's nameless charismatic hero (as playful in his storytelling as in his numerous martial arts scenes) is engaging. It is fitting that his final act of self-sacrifice gives birth to an empire whose mark the world still bears.

The overwhelming atmosphere of this year's programme though, was one of paranoia, doubt and fear. If the rest of the world wasn't out to get you (Belgium's *Calvaire* or Korea's *Old Boy*), then it was the face looking back at you in the mirror. Marc Evans followed up his wonderfully

nasty chiller *My Little Eye* with *Trauma*, a study of grief, psychosis and stalking made all the more unsettling for the performance of housewives' choice and TV's Mr Darcy, Colin Firth, as the fracturing personality at the film's heart. Just as disturbing was an emaciated Christian Bale, who lost 63 pounds for his title role in *The Machinist*. Bale is magnetic as the obsessed, paranoid insomniac whose guilt is literally consuming him and his eventual epiphany is a shattering experience.

The secret lurking at the dark heart of *Old Boy*, Park Chan-Wook's follow-up to 2002's *Sympathy for Mr Vengeance* is equally shattering but our journey to it is a lot more fun. In a set-up that screams high-concept Hollywood remake, we watch as an anonymous wage slave is kidnapped, framed for murder and held in Terry Waite-style isolation for 15 years before being released without explanation. His demented search for the reason behind his imprisonment, and his attempt to exact retribution, leads to bone-crunching violence, some decidedly amateur dental work and a revelation that even if you see it coming, still shocks.

*Calvaire* on the other hand is just repellent. Playing like an episode of *The League of Gentlemen* (with the laughs substituted with buggery, bestiality, torture, crucifixion, cross-dressing), I realised about halfway through just how a country as boring as Belgium could produce serial child abuser and killer, Marc Dutroux.

The most satisfying film for me though was *Kontroll*, a stylish, hyperkinetic, fluorescent and neon-soaked ride through the Budapest subway system. With not a frame of natural light in the entire movie, *Kontroll* juggles the antics of a group of misfit ticket inspectors with the hunt for a hooded serial killer shoving travellers under trains and the troubled hero's tentative romance with a fare-dodging girl dressed as a bear. Dark, hypnotic and shot through with a humour that's blacker than a Budapest tunnel, *Kontroll* works both as a conventional thriller and, on a deeper level, as a metaphysical battle between good and evil for possession of a man's soul with the healing power of love as the redemptive force that tips the balance. The most successful Hungarian film of last year, *Kontroll*'s remake rights have already been snapped up by Hollywood but do yourself a favour — see it before they remake it.

David Watson

## Finding Nemo

Andrew Stanton, Lee Unkrich, 2003  
(available on DVD and video)

How can you teach children about love, loss and bereavement, about uncertainty, the value of people with disabilities and special needs, about people with short-term memory loss and addictive behaviour? How, in a society gripped by fear and panic about children do you teach them independence and mutual reliance, about how to take risks? Well you could do a lot worse than watching *Finding Nemo* with your offspring.

Walt Disney, with the shrewd business acumen that has led to the endurance of that corporation have found a gem in Pixar, the company that brought us *Toy Story* and *Monsters Inc*. These were stories that, while beautifully animated and filled with action, had at their core truths about friendship and affection but were not afraid to address jealousy and conflict. There are the usual knowing touches and gentle jokes that will go straight over the heads of anyone under the age of 12 years. The fact is that there is a message for parents in the film — that we risk disabling our children by overprotecting them.

Marlin loses his wife and fish eggs in an attack by a barracuda. The one remaining egg hatches into his only son Nemo, whom he coddles and overprotects. Nemo, although clearly close to his father, wants to walk on his own two feet (or swim with his own flippers). In doing so he gets lost and the rest of the story is taken up with Marlin's search for his errant son. Add to the mix the fact the Nemo is disabled (a small right flipper), that he meets sharks keen to shake off addiction to eating fish, and Dory, Marlin's helper in the search, has what seems to be Korsakoff's syndrome, and you have a great story.

It may irk parents that they are sucked into the commercialisation that sees Nemo peaking out from just about every bottle of diluting juice and breakfast cereal in the supermarket ('Mum, can we have the one with Nemo on it?'). It may also become an expensive prospect as Nemo finds his way onto bedspreads, towels, lunchboxes and T-shirts. But the overt commercialisation of the little fish should not obscure the fact that the little character will be one parents want their little ones emulate — resourceful, friendly, loving, and brave.

The graphics are up to Pixar's usual extremely high standards and the sound and voice work are excellent. Smaller children may find the scenes with Bruce the shark a little scary, so be prepared for time spent on your knee.

Paul, Ruairidh and Tom Keeley