



welcome to rom-com hell

flicks for foreigners

Like it or not, February is all about heart-shaped chocolate and manufactured affection (well, that and throwing beans at monsters). Luckily for us all, there are enough new films out this month to appease the cuddly couples who enjoy each other's company so much that singles find their company nauseating, as well as those brave men who stand up and say "No! I will not pretend to like a romantic comedy!"

Perhaps the least conventional Valentine movie you can catch this month is *Surrogates*, by director Jonathon Mostow and starring the big bad baldie, Bruce Willis. This one has a pretty cool concept: a future world where people live their lives through robots known as "Surrogates" (hence the movie's title, I dare say) and hardly ever see the world through their own eyes. Willis's character, Tom Greer, goes into this world with his own body to investigate a string of murders. As intriguing as that may sound, the trailer portrays *Surrogates* as a below-par action flick, so fans of mind-bending sci-fi will likely be disappointed. The CGI also looks rather shaky in the aftermath of *Avatar*, while awareness of Mostow's past projects (*Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* and *US71*) may have people opting for a seat on the next bus home rather than one inside the cinema.



Meryl Streep shows that middle-aged life after marriage can be filled with debauchery - that is, if you have an architect (Steve Martin) and a lawyer (Alec Baldwin) trying to get inside your pants - in *It's Complicated*, a romantic comedy aimed at an audience "mature" enough to remember the fall of the Berlin Wall, the moon landing and the invention of sliced bread. Many believe that director Nancy Meyers is able to make women cry with laughter, jealousy and anguish in equal measure, whilst also entertaining the token bored boyfriend. The same claim was made with Meyers' *What Women Want*, which had bored boyfriends everywhere crying with disappointment, boredom and confusion in equal measure. I wouldn't expect this movie to break any barriers, but rom-coms are a tried-

and-tested formula, so if you *do* like this genre, I'm sure you'll enjoy this movie too.



Coming two days before the 14th, slightly confusingly, is *Valentine's Day*, a movie about couples that have argued, broken up and got back together thanks to the crushing pressure of everyone's favorite holiday, *Setsubun*. No, that's not right. Anyway, this movie is filled with high-rollers: Jessica Alba, Jessica Biel, Anne Hathaway, Julia Roberts, Jennifer Garner, and many more. But as it also stars Ashton Kutcher and Queen Latifa it could border on the unwatchable. This will have to work hard to be anything other than an average and rather dull rom-com, and I doubt it will even try to avoid that fate. Still, if you have a first date organized, this'll do the trick.



The last Western movie out this month is most welcome for being a little different: it's a Clint Eastwood project called *Invictus*, which follows the 1995 South African rugby team, who play in an attempt to heal the fresh and sore wounds of a country all but ripped apart by apartheid. After playing holier-than-thou cops, loyal chauffeurs, adorable prisoners and GOD, Morgan Freeman had little else left to accomplish in his acting career, but playing Nelson Mandela is arguably his biggest achievement since starring alongside Keanu Reeves. Matt Damon also takes a starring role and may finally have found a film to help him shake off the shackles of Jason Bourne and *Team America*. This could be the month's best, but, like most Clint Eastwood projects, it is a tad long, running in at 134 minutes. So if you're expecting wham-bam, thank you Magnum (that nearly rhymes) you'll be disappointed.

new japanese cinema



The Japanese movies of February are a mixed bag, but if you have a kid who needs entertaining you're in luck, as not only is there a *Shinkenger* movie in the form of 侍戦隊シンケンジャー VS ゴーオンジャー 銀幕BANG!!, but there is also a new *Kamen Rider* film out there: 仮面ライダー×仮面ライダーW&ディケイドMOVIE 大戦2010. Both stick to the regular formulae of the mind-bogglingly popular TV shows, though I reckon *Shinkenger* will be more entertaining since it has the exclamation "BANG!!" in its title.



For grown-ups, meanwhile, there's *Boys on the Run*, by director Daisuke Miura and starring Kazunobu Mineda, aka the lead singer from Ginnan Boyz. The story follows Mineda's character, who works for a small toy manufacturer. He's never had a girlfriend but he has the hots for a cute co-worker. This is a quirky twist on the Valentine-time movie template and should be worth watching when it gets a limited release in February (the road-show starts on January 30th).



a japanese gem



My Japanese Gem this month is a bit more expensive than usual but makes for a morbid Valentine's Night in. In my local Tsutaya I saw an ex-rental version of Takashi Miike's amazing, appalling and genre-defining *Audition* for ¥980. Miike is a director who doesn't merely ignore genre boundaries but goes out of his way to abuse and destroy them. *Audition* starts out as a movie about a widower trying to find a new wife. His method of finding a new lady is a little strange: he holds an audition for actresses, yet all the while his ulterior motive is firmly at the front of his mind. And so the film trundles along in the kinda-creepy vein. I don't want to give much away, but let me just say that sticking with the film will reward horror fans, and the abrupt jumps from one scenario to the next put David Lynch to shame. This isn't exactly the ideal movie to cuddle up to, but watching it alone in a darkened room is just the ticket.

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