

Mallrats spurs few guffaws



Courtesy of Gramercy Pictures

Brodie (Jason Lee) and T. S. (Jeremy London) arrive at the mall which serves as the focus of Kevin Smith's sophomore effort, *Mallrats*.

By **BRYAN THOMAS**
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

Mallrats is the second offering from Kevin Smith, the young writer and director of the highly acclaimed *Clerks*. In fact, you could say that *Mallrats* is *Clerks* gone shopping.

This time, however, Smith is working with new characters, an expanded budget, multiple sets and some semblance of a plot.

These factors would lead one to expect *Mallrats* to be bigger and better than its predecessor. Not so.

Clerks clicked because of its incredible script full of insightful observations into a day in the life of two convenience store clerks. Its obviously restricted budget added to its charm, giving the film that ragged quality which evokes underdog sentiments in American moviegoers.

For *Mallrats*, it seems as though Hollywood gave Smith an entire mall, Shannen Doherty and a cushioned expense account and told him to go crazy.

The story is based loosely around T.S. (Jeremy London) and Brodie (Jason Lee), two college-age guys who are dumped by their respective girl-

friends, played by Claire Forlani and Doherty.

The two downtrodden dumpies decide to seek comfort and condolence at the mall, where, with the help of two loser mallrats, Jay (Jason Mewes) and Silent Bob (Smith), they mastermind a plot to win back their lost loves.

The ensuing adventures and misadventures range from the insanely stupid to the absurdly hilarious. The humor is hit-and-miss, directed toward the children of the '80s and full of jokes about video games and MTV.

The mall setting lends itself to a handful of gags poking fun at escalators, mall guards, food courts and those frustrating hidden 3-D pictures that have become a staple in malls across the country.

The setting also shines a spotlight on a slice of society that Smith portrays as fairly pathetic. For the characters in the movie, the mall is not only a consumer and social center, but the very center of their lives. See *Mallrats*, Page B6



Beloved monsters spice up old films

By **EDDIE CHILDRESS**
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

If you want a scary double feature for a belated Halloween party, rent *The Exorcist* and *Silence of the Lambs*. However, if you want to wallow like a pig in classic Hollywood cultural icons, you can't get any better than the original movie monsters.

Dracula and *Frankenstein*, the original 1941 horror classics somewhat based on the novels, defined the long-standing cultural icons of the Transylvanian count and the mad doctor's inhuman creation.

You think you see Forrest Gump everywhere; try to remember the first time you saw that stiff-walking giant or heard that bad Romanian accent.

The "often imitated, never duplicated" cliché applies, though. This is the "real" thing; this is not Herman Munster, nor do you hear "I want to zuck your blood" even once.

In true Hollywood fashion, however, these are not good movies. They are deserving of the term "flicks." In *Frankenstein*, for example, the plot is shaky at best.

One scene jumps from an innocent girl giving a daisy to the monster, both of them smiling and laughing, to the same girl's lifeless body being carried by her father.

The acting is melodramatic and occasionally unmotivated; for example, Dr. Frankenstein makes a far too abrupt change from mad scientist to mad-at-his-creation scientist. The dialogue can get painful in its inanity, necessary exposition notwithstanding.

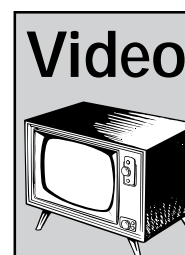
However, Boris Karloff as the creation of the devilish doctor is worth the rental fee. This is the man who has defined the seven-foot flat-headed freak for three generations.

I must admit, the first time I heard him growl, I thought to myself, "Wow, he's really got it

down," before I remembered that he was the one who made it up in the first place.

Dracula suffers from similar problems in plot and dialogue as *Frankenstein*, and again most of the characters are not convincing.

However, of particular note is Renfield, the lawyer-turned-madman and unwilling slave to the Count. He rants and raves with a refreshing abandon that eclipses anyone else who shares the stage, with the exception, of course, of Count Dracula himself. See *Videos*, Page B6



Big River translates Twain yarn into musical setting

By **CHRIS IRWIN**
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

The university theatre's Mainstage has been a bustling chaos of late; the cast and crew of *Big River*, a musical based on Mark Twain's enduring and enjoyable classic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, have been gearing up for Friday's opening show.

The loosely organized but steady flow of personnel, tools and discussion indicates that something big is obviously going on at the theater.

Indeed, there is something big going on — huge, in fact. *Big River* is a grandiose production to stage.

Aside from the gigantic cast, the technical trimmings are in abundance. Looking around, it seems that there are as many pieces of scenery as there are cast members.

Secondly, afternoon rehearsals are the norm, not the exception. For most Mainstage productions, actors rehearse three and a half hours six nights a week.

For the cast of *Big River*, though, this is just the beginning. When the

main characters are not running through lines with one another, they are in music or acting rehearsals. Actors may rehearse all afternoon and evening, often with only a dinner break.

Due to its intense complexity, *Big River* demanded a director outside of the theater department and even Winston-Salem.

Director Phillip Burton has been a freelance director in New York City since 1978. In a city and profession where self-preservation is success, Burton has risen above mere profes-

sional subsistence and established himself as a man who knows his way around a theater.

Burton first worked with the university theatre three years ago as an assistant director of *Dark Of the Moon*. His return to the theater is a treat for those involved in the production.

Burton has insisted that *Big River* be executed with great weight and meaning.

Rather than present the musical as sheer entertainment, he has pushed his actors to play their roles with depth and impart the work with a

sense of pertinence and importance. Several of the cast echoed Burton's sentiments and said that the play gave them a renewed appreciation of their friendships.

More than one actor said that performing in *Big River* was more demanding than just playing a role in a thin musical comedy.

"Everybody works as a team," assistant stage manager junior Lydia Toon Fleury said. "It's the first show I've worked on where there weren't any prima donnas."

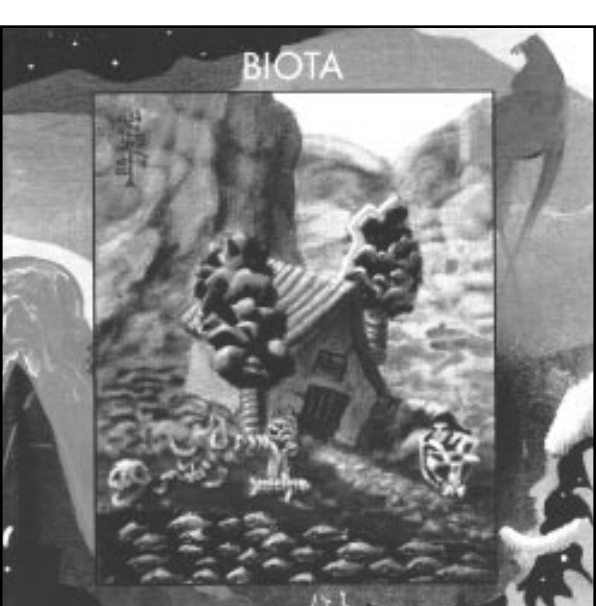
Big River promises to be an ener-

getic show. The theater department has challenged itself with such a big production, but the hard-working cast and crew is confident that the show will be a success.

Big River will play at 8 p.m. Friday, Saturday and Wednesday through Nov. 12 and at 2 p.m. Nov. 13 on the Mainstage in the Scales Fine Arts Center. The fee will be \$5 for students and \$10 for adults.

There is a student preview tonight at 8 p.m. The fee is \$2.50. For more information, call the University Box Office at Ext. 5295.

Biota creates magical stew; Rancid plays power punk



Biota
Object Holder (RÉR)

By **MIKE JANSSEN**
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Listening to Biota's *Object Holder* is like peeping at a secret parade of mythical beasts and space aliens equipped with outlandish instruments, playing for their own gratification.

From the opening strains of "Bumpreader," the album's first track, it's obvious that Biota aims to defy every conceivable convention. A faint beat begins beneath a veneer of syrupy distortion; its evolution is cut short by an unidentifiable noise which sounds like a mythical Leviathan surfacing from a body of water.

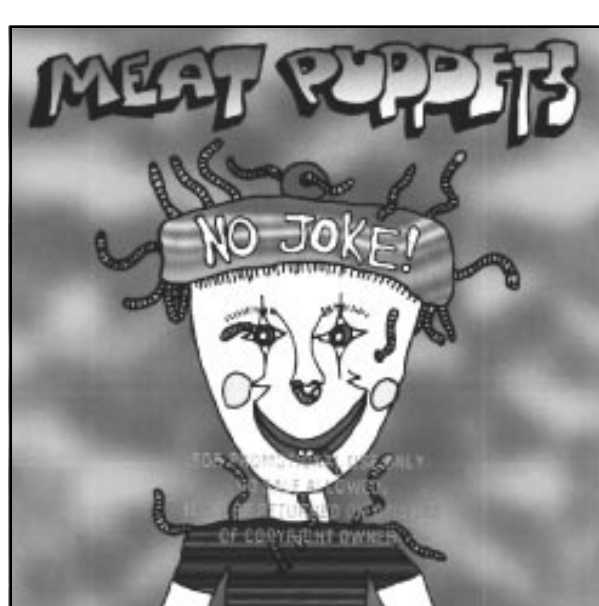
The tune then erupts in a haze of Arabic woodwinds, off-kilter electric guitar and severely processed drums which barely form a cohesive beat. Think of floating down a rushing river without a branch to grab on to, and you're on the way to understanding Biota.

A conglomeration of 11 artists and musicians make up the enigmatic ensemble; not only does their music fill out the CD's 70 minutes, but the lavishly illustrated 12-page booklet bears their brightly coloured, mind-boggling experimental artwork.

The eerie pictures alone are worth the \$17 tag (it's an import), and they echo the album's layered, abstract tone. Many of the paintings evoke Kandinsky, and Biota almost lives up to the converse of the Russian painter's goal — whereas Kandinsky wanted to paint music, Biota aims to play paintings.

Electronic manipulation plays a big part in Biota's unique noise, which makes the end product almost ironic. By embracing modern technology, the Mnemonists (as Biota's members call themselves) have somehow crafted an eternal tribal music that feels like it has always been lodged in the collective unconscious, just waiting for someone to extract it. Everybody's dreams should have a soundtrack by Biota and backdrops by the group as well.

Local stores don't carry Biota's music; if you can't order *Object Holder* through nearby outlets, write Cuneiform Records at Box 8427, Silver Spring, MD 20907.



Meat Puppets
No Joke! (London)

By **KYLE FORST**
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

There's a reason why the Meat Puppets remained completely unknown for the better part of their fourteen-year recording career: they're not that good. Until "Backwater," their breakthrough single from 1994's *Too High To Die*, they spent almost 12 years making shaky, inconsistent music that bore the mark of too many drugs.

With *No Joke!*, the follow-up to their only successful release, they hoped to cash in big on the modern rock trend which earned them popularity in the first place.

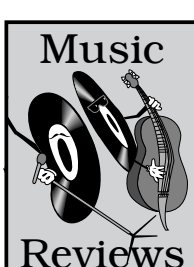
A title like *No Joke!* is highly ironic for this album; it gives the initial impression that this album is not a fluke and is indeed good music. But it's really a monotonous, repetitive waste of an album that has one word written all over it: LSD.

The only decent song is "Scum," the catchy opener that's propelled its way to your local radio station's rotation. Other than this exception, *No Joke!* is filled with western-style Roy Orbison knockoffs, cheesy love song clones and lead singer Curt Kirkwood's aggravating one-note voice that all the songs center around.

After a minute and a half, all the songs on the album repeat the rhythms for about two minutes because there's nothing really interesting to be done. The most offensive songs of this nature are "Nothing," "Vampires" and "Eyeball."

The rest of the songs, specifically "Head," "Taste Of The Sun" and "For Free," meander slowly and aimlessly, putting you asleep with Kirkwood's monotone voice and the boring, plodding musical arrangements reminiscent of a bad country band.

Much like the Grateful Dead, the Meat Puppets make the statement "Once the LSD wears off, the music really sucks" come true. Hey, no joke.



Rancid
...And Out Come the Wolves (Epitaph)

By **CHRIS GREZLAK**
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

Rising from the ashes of poverty and drug problems, Tim Armstrong and his punk band Rancid now find themselves teetering on the brink of mainstream success. While they have been popular for years among the American punk subculture, it is only with their latest effort that Rancid may finally get the credit they deserve.

The band's response to a multimillion dollar offer from Epic Records (which they tastefully declined), *...And Out Come The Wolves* is composed of nineteen tracks of raw, hard-hitting energy.

Influenced by the sounds of classic punk such as The Clash and more recent underground greats like Operation Ivy, this newest release documents the band's progression towards melody, harmony and variety.

The first track, "Maxwell Murder," is reminiscent of old Rancid, comprised of coarse vocals, an incredible bass solo and lyrics inspired by life on the streets. Armstrong and Lars Frederikson provide the riffs and undefined vocals as Brett Reed hammers away on drums. Armstrong's best performance is on the Clash-inspired "The 11th Hour" and the Oi! anthem "Avenues and Alleyways," while Frederikson takes the lead for such great tunes as "Roots Radicals" and "Listed MIA."

Rancid returns to Armstrong's days in Operation Ivy with the ska-seeded songs "Old Friend" and "Time Bomb," the latter of which is currently being aired on MTV. Other songs sound more poppy, such as "Ruby Soho" and my personal favorite, "Olympia WA." This progression could possibly invite the mainstream to embrace Rancid, but the change is a tremendous improvement musically.

Although they cover familiar punk territory, Rancid does so with fury, focus and a strong anti-violence message. With the release of *...And Out Come The Wolves*, Rancid has not only produced their best effort to date, but has arguably stolen the position of the decade's best punk revivalists; Green Day has met its match. Contrary to popular belief, punk is not dead.



Into Another
Seemless (Hollywood)

By **MAX SCHNURER**
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

This month marks the fourth release of Into Another, the eclectic New York City quartet. *Seemless*, their major label debut, is a stunning piece of post-apocalyptic dreamcore.

Into Another is a hardcore supergroup gone twisted, fronted by Richie Birkenhead, former guitarist for Youth of Today and ex-lead singer for the New York hardcore band Underdog. Richie screams and whines with more emotion than once thought humanly possible.

Bassist Tony Bono, a self-proclaimed metalhead from New Jersey, holds the band together with thundering bass lines that give Into Another a distinctive and powerful sound. Peter Moses, an introspective guitarist, lightens up the Into Another sound with solos and innovative riffs.

Drew Thomas, the former drummer for Bold and Youth of Today, powers through the album with style and finesse. Together the members make a powerful sound. The sound of Into Another falls somewhere between Black Sabbath and Opera, and the new album continues their mind-twist evolution.

Beginning with a tune called "Mutate Me," Richie Birkenhead screams an emotional tribute to advanced evolution, making a solid beginning to an album which only gets better. *Seemless* includes several twisted love songs, including "T.A.I.L.," a previously unreleased live favorite about reptiles in love, and "Regarding Earthlings," an exploration of extraterrestrial family values.

The most powerful songs are the last two tunes on the album, "May I" and "The Way Down." "May I" is an impressive love song put over screeching music intended to jangle the nerves, reminding us what it is like to first be in love. "The Way Down" is a heartfelt missive to all the introspective kids in the world.

Into Another will be playing in Wilmington Wednesday, so see them if you can. Try to pick up the album as well — it is clearly one of the most innovative and effective musical masterpieces ever released.