

[flash]

Sept. 18, 2003

Entertaining
your adult
brain,

page 6



Illustration by Lucas Antoniak
Photo background by Micah Miller

from the senior [flash] editor

[Lindsey Turner]

[flash] to rock the Red Rose Sept. 26

It's the mission of [flash] to highlight the area's musical talent, but we're going further. We're going to bring the talent straight to you. Friday, Sept. 26, Forget Cassettes and Not Before Noon will rock the Red Rose, courtesy of [flash]. Thus begins a monthly pattern of good music and fun times brought to you by [flash]. Each month, bands we profile will be bringing you the rock at various Murfreesboro venues. This month's show will begin at 9 p.m. and will only cost you \$5. All proceeds go to the venue and the band; [flash] gets nothing. We'll just be there rocking with you.

[flash]

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[flash] is the weekly entertainment tabloid produced by *Sidelines*, MTSU's editorially independent student newspaper. *Sidelines* is published each Thursday and seeks to highlight local arts and entertainment. For information regarding [flash], call (615) 898-2917. To apply to work for [flash], e-mail us at slflash@mtsu.edu or apply in the James Union Building, Room 310.

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the 'boro's best 2003 ballot

★ Please nominate as few national chains as possible ★

MUSIC

Best Murfreesboro band

Best Murfreesboro musician

Best place to hear live music

Best place to play live music

Food and drink continued

Best service (restaurant)

Best service (bar)

Best drunk/stoned food

Best grab-and-go lunch place

FOOD & DRINK

Bar with the best bartenders

Best cup of coffee

Best mixed drinks

Best happy hour

Best beer

Best atmosphere (restaurant)

Best atmosphere (bar)

Best breakfast

Best Mexican food

Best oriental food

Best sit-down meal in town

ART & ENTERTAINMENT

Best place to spend a Friday night

Best place to spend a Saturday night

Best place to spend a weeknight

Best place to pick up a date

Best place to take your date

Best place to cheat on your date

Best place to dance

Best place to rent videos

Best place to experience local culture

Best place to see local art

Best place to sit, chill out and read

You can submit your ballot to [flash] several ways. Drop it off at the *Sidelines* office in the James Union Building, Room 310. Mail it to *Sidelines* at 1301 E. Main St. MTSU Box 8, Murfreesboro, TN 37132. Fax it to (615) 904.8193. Download the ballot online at www.mtsusidelines.com. Just whatever you do, send in your ballot. Call (615) 898.2917 if you have any questions.

Nintendo's 'F-Zero' is really f'ing fast

By Jack Stone

The time has finally come for Nintendo fans to hold on to spandex, because it seems we finally have a true masterpiece on our hands.

On Aug. 26, Nintendo released the futuristic racing game *F-Zero GX* (developed by Sega's Amusement Vision). It's awesome. By far, this game is the most intense racing game I have ever played, combining elements of raw beauty, technology and pure speed into a tasty concoction that will leave you wanting more.

Believe me, *F-Zero GX* gives more than you can handle. The speed of the game mixed with the super track design makes for some very difficult racing action. It isn't the frustrating sort of difficulty though; it's more like the "Oh good! I get to do it again!" type of difficulty. The racing is so freaking fun that you won't mind playing the same track over and over.

The sheer aesthetics of the game will also make you glad to revisit the same track a couple hundred times. Amusement Vision did a superb job filling each level with intense color and detail. I'm still amazed when I see the gigantic floating cities, beautiful sunsets, moonlit nights, rain drops and heat distortion all flying past me in the blink of an eye. It's a Zen-like experience on heroin.

Speaking of heroin, all the old flamboyant, hyped-up characters are back from the original

games (plus some new ones, of course). Gamers race against 29 different racers simultaneously at speeds that have been known to induce involuntary bladder relaxation. Players learn about each individual racer by adventuring through the game's story mode.

Story mode delivers a surprisingly strong, detailed and even interesting plot, jam-packed with smooth full-motion video sequences (a rarity on Nintendo). The FMV scenes show a futuristic world full of hovering shops, dirty allies and vividly detailed characters delivered through the Gamecube with fluid animation.

Amusement Vision did a number on the title's sound effects as well. The music is filled with tons of rock and techno beats, the story mode conversations are clear and the in-game effects make you feel like you're in the cockpit with Captain Falcon (Oh yes, there's a first-person cockpit view).

Great graphics, sound, unprecedented speed and a fluid story mode - all this and I have yet to even speak of the multiplayer and upgradeable hover car options, which simply scream replayability.

F-Zero GX is a must buy (not rent) for every gamer. No Gamecube? Go get one; you won't regret it. Kudos to Amusement Vision and Nintendo on a job well done. ★

'F-Zero'



(out of four stars)
Nintendo
Released Aug. 26

Listening session to reveal hidden talent

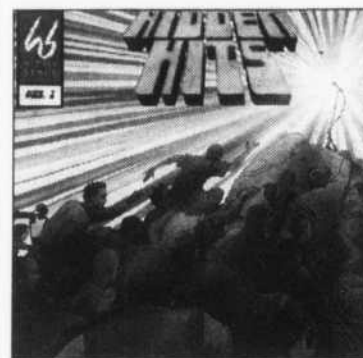
By Lindsey Turner

Students can network and get a glimpse of some up-and-coming hip-hop and soul talent tonight at Phat Kaps in Hickory Hollow Mall in Antioch, Tenn.

Hidden Beach Recordings, an independent label based in Santa Monica, Calif., will host a listening session to promote their July 2003 release, *Hidden Hits Vol. 1*.

The album contains tracks from artists the label contends are the newest wave of hip-hop and soul talent. And, if Hidden Beach's past tastes signify anything, they might be onto something. After all, it was Hidden that helped place Jill Scott, Darius Rucker and Mike Phillips in the spotlight.

The listening session will "provide an opportunity to network and build new friendships and learn about the store and the label," said Joey Langford, a Hidden Beach intern who is putting



the listening session together. The session will also provide interested students and musicians with a chance to meet renowned gospel musician William Carter.

Those who come to the session - the fourth local Hidden Beach listening session, two of which have been held at Phat Kaps - will be able to register for giveaways and learn

about the label's internship program.

Langford, an MTSU sophomore recording industry major, said Hidden Beach has representatives all over the country and even the world, in Atlanta, New York, Japan, Germany and more.

For the next Hidden Beach promotional event, Langford said, he would like to organize an album exchange so that up-and-coming artists can get their music out to the public and to each other.

The listening session, which is free, will begin tonight at 7 at Phat Kaps, located on the first floor of the mall, next to JC Penney. *Hidden Hits Vol. 1* will be available to buy, with tracks by Aquila, Trek Life, Jamal and more.

For more information on Hidden Beach, visit www.hiddenbeach.com, or e-mail hiddenbeachtn@hotmail.com. ★

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'Cold Creek Manor' might warm your pants

By Joe Freisinger

Don't go to upstate New York. Stay in the city.

That's what Dale Massie, played by Stephen Dorff, would like you to think.

Massie, former owner of Cold Creek Manor, is a convicted felon, recently released from jail, trying to reclaim his property that was sold due to his inability to make payments. Dennis Quaid and Sharon Stone play Cooper and Leah Tilson, who, because they were fed up with city life, have just moved into the manor with their kids.

Right from the start, Massie and the Tilsons fail to get along. Dale's upset because they bought his house and land for half its worth, and he didn't receive any money for it. The Tilsons are upset because, as nice and friendly as Dale is, he's a creepy convicted felon who keeps hanging around their house, trying to get them to leave.

Dennis Quaid and Sharon Stone are semi-convincing as a loving/frustrated married couple who keep having problems with the former owner of the house. They don't quite have

'Cold Creek Manor'

Starring Sharon Stone,
Dennis Quaid

Rated R

Touchstone Pictures
Release date Sept. 19

Rating ★★★
(out of four stars)

an on-screen chemistry, but they're believable enough for a suspense thriller.

Stephen Dorff, on the other hand, looks comfortably at home as an eerie, mullet-wielding, Country-Joe-McDonald psychopath. Juliette



Photo courtesy of Touchstone Pictures

Cooper (Dennis Quaid) and Leah (Sharon Stone) Tilson share an innocent, happy moment with their children before things get creepy.

Lewis is equally credible as Ruby, Dale's quasi-trashy/slutty girlfriend.

The story takes a while to develop, thanks to director Mike Figgis and writer Richard Jefferies. Once it gets going, it stops again for a while, and then it really takes off ... and

stops as soon as it started.

Cold Creek Manor really is a pretty decent movie, but I felt like I'd seen it before. Weird things go on out in the country. The protagonists try to find out information on a deceptively faultless character, and wind up in big-time dan-

ger. It was kind of *Silence of the Lambs* and sort of *The Ring*, but not as tense or mind-requiring (whatever that means).

It's entertaining, but something you only care to see once or twice.

Cold Creek Manor opens tomorrow. ★

BRAIN RESEARCH STUDY

A research study at *Vanderbilt University Medical Center* is exploring the effects of prior drug use on brain structure and function. We are enrolling people between the ages of 18-35 who have used recreational drugs, including Ecstasy. Brain structure and function will be measured by Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). Confidential. For more information, call (615) 343-9669.

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'Cabin Fever' plagued with good intentions

By Forrest Sanders

During the making of his horror masterpiece *Halloween*, it was director John Carpenter's philosophy that it wasn't what graphic images were shown, but the audience's imagination that made a film so terrifying. In the past 25 years, directors have decided to give the imagination a break.

The Motion Picture Association of America has gone through degrees of leniency over the years with the graphic nature of horror films. One has to wonder, though, if the board behind the MPAA was in a full state of consciousness when they screened *Cabin Fever*.

Of course, *Cabin Fever* isn't one of the most graphic films ever made, but audiences should be warned to bring an iron stomach when watching a film starring a flesh-devouring disease and an unlucky group of wilderness lovers.

The film features numerous shots of the effect the virus has on its victims and viewers should be wary of a particular leg-shaving scene which has to rank as the most disgusting thing put on film since Anthony Hopkins displayed his cooking skills in *Hannibal*.

It's been a 10-year journey for first-time director Eli Roth to write, direct and find a distributor for *Cabin Fever* and, while the end result shows Roth's innate ability to make us cringe, in a few instances, he can make us scared, too.

As a matter of fact, one of the film's most effective moments has nothing to do with the deadly virus at all, except in the reenactment of a genuinely chilling campfire story. Perhaps what's most unexpected, though, is Roth's ability to make us laugh. *Cabin Fever* balances its terror with a bizarre blend of comedy, courtesy of a party-loving deputy and a mullet-headed 10-year-old with an obsession for pancakes and experience in Kung Fu.

If the quality performances of the side characters were a surprise to you,

'Cabin Fever'

Starring Lordann Ladd,
Rider Strong

Rated R

Lions Gate Entertainment

Released Sept. 12

Rating ★★1/2
(out of four stars)

it may be a shock that the lead group of good-looking teens are actually pretty decent thespians themselves. Not all the characters are likable and each of their fates may not be entirely fair.

It's for certain, though, that none of the characters' actions are beyond believability. When the first of the teens becomes infected, the others lock her in a shed to avoid the chance that they, too, will catch the disease. The act seems cruel to the audience, but when lives are at stake, it also makes you wonder if the characters had any other alternative. This group paranoia theme was touched upon earlier this year in *28 Days Later*, but with *Cabin Fever*, it's explored to its fullest.

No matter the hype surrounding the film, however (much due to the rave review given to the film by *Lord of the Rings* director Peter Jackson), *Cabin Fever* is still plagued (sorry, couldn't resist) by the same conventions that have become notorious within the genre.

The car still stalls at the most inconvenient moments and no matter how many people get infected inside the cabin, the teens opt to come back rather than try to escape. The final 15 minutes also disappoint with a central character's fate being far too abrupt, while the final scene is a bizarrely unfit-



Photo courtesy of Lions Gate

Rider Strong might be smiling now, but wait until the flesh-eating plague devours him and all his good-looking friends in Eli Roth's *Cabin Fever*. Despite its flaws, it's still got enough gumption to impress.

ting cap-off to the film that came before it.

Despite its flaws, *Cabin Fever* still manages to be a potent little horror thriller, paying enough homage to the

classics to satisfy any horror aficionado. As for this film's core audience of gore hounds, *Cabin Fever* is definitely worth catching. ★

Entertaining your adult brain

Nashville is full of things that are fun – even if you're not on a field trip

By Amber Bryant

rowing up in Nashville,

my elementary and middle school classes went on many a field trip. While Middle Tennessee may appear to be boring and too Southern for comfort, we have some pretty cool places to visit. From the zoo to the planetarium to our countless museums and art exhibits, there's never a dull moment when using your imagination and/or getting stoned. Thank Baby Jesus the fun doesn't have to end with adulthood. Next time you're ready to leave the college scene and take a trip down memory lane, check out some of Tennessee's best boredom-beaters:



Adventure Science Center

Hours: 10 a.m. until 5 p.m., Monday-Saturday

12:30 p.m. until 5:30 p.m., Sunday

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Planetarium admission is \$3.50 or \$2 with center admission

Phone: 615.862.5160

Web site: www.adventuresci.com

When was the last time you hung out with dinosaurs, crawled through a beating heart and built a skyscraper? The Adventure Science Center isn't just for fourth grade field trips anymore. Exercise your cerebellum outside of a university setting by simulating a freedom flight and learning how science is helping people overcome physical handicaps. If science bores you, come to the center through Oct. 5 where Satan and Frankenstein add a ghoulish kick to the atom. After you visit the Center, fork out a couple of bucks to lounge in a chair and watch the stars (without the fear of mosquitoes, thanks) at the Sudekum Planetarium. ★



Illustration by Lucas Antoniak

Tennessee State Museum

Hours: 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday

1 p.m. until 4 p.m., Sunday

Admission: Free

Phone: 615.741.2692

Web site: www.tnmuseum.org

Pretend you're a colonial wench or loincloth-wearing Cherokee (nothing says "clinically insane" better than playing pretend when you're over the age of 10) while learning the history of the great state of Tennessee. An entire room is filled with artistic quilts, each made by hand in the days when women were little more than ornaments. Before you leave, check out a few of the realistic pioneer settings, featuring stuffed raccoon corpses and the like. ★



Nashville Children's Theatre

Ticket price: \$35 for a five-show pass

\$29 for a four-show pass

\$23 for a three-show pass

\$16 for a two-show pass

Phone: 615.254.9103

Web site: www.nashvillechildrenstheatre.com

This season's shows include *Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs*, *Treasure Island*, *Before the People Came* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Be you a theater major or a thespian, everyone loves a bunch of adults running around trying to make kids laugh. Don't worry about crying second graders, either. The shows almost always keep everyone's eyes glued to the stage. ★



Nashville Zoo

Hours: 9 a.m. until 6 p.m.,

April 1-Oct. 31

Admission: \$2 for parking

\$8 for adults

\$6 for ages 3-12

Phone: 615.833.1534

Web site: www.nashvillezoo.org

Now that the weather has cooled off, the smell of animal poo won't be quite as concentrated. Take a cue from Tony Soprano and head to the zoo to relax and put life in perspective (only try not to cheat on your wife in the meantime). Whether you're staring blankly at cuddly panda bears or reveling in snake-inspired evil, you'll realize that being a human is way better than hanging out in a cage all day with no responsibility, scratching yourself and mating with whomever you ... OK, so maybe humanism is overrated. If you really want to live vicariously through an animal or two, a \$25 donation will allow you to "adopt" an animal, although you won't get to take it home. Special events include the old-timey Harvest Days on Sept. 27 and 28, and the always-popular Ghouls at Grassmere Oct. 25 through 31. ★

(Left) Even children know that it's entirely possible to have fun and learn at the same time. These kids at Adventure Science Center are having a whooping good time while putting wrinkles of knowledge in their little brains.

(Right) The Frist Science Center at Cheekwood is not only a good time, but it's pretty, too.

Photos by Micah Miller

Hang out with the dinosaurs at the Adventure Science Center in Nashville.



Entertain your brain some more.
See **Kid Stuff**, page 8

Continued from **Kid Stuff**, page 7

Cheekwood Botanical Garden

Hours: 9:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday

11 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., Sunday

Admission: \$10 for adults

\$5 for ages 6-17 and students

Phone: 615.356.8000

Web site: www.cheekwood.org

Fall foliage and art come together on 55 acres of historical family-owned beauty, perfect for inspiring your muse and making out with the kid who sits next to you in literature class. Check out the massive art exhibit in the Georgian-style mansion and eat at the Pineapple Room Restaurant. Cheekwood is constantly hosting events designed for the rabid nature lover, including the Pumpkin Fair Oct. 12 and numerous wine-tastings à la Frasier Crane. ★

Nashville Toy Museum and Train Store

Hours: 10 a.m. until 5 p.m., Monday-Sunday

Admission: \$1.75 for adults

\$.75 for ages 6-11

Phone: 615.391.3516

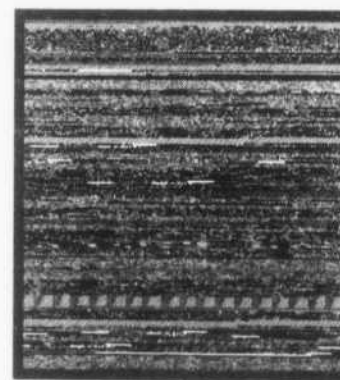
Web site: www.toytrains.citysearch.com

Remember the days when Christmas wasn't a wallet-draining pain? Visit this charming museum and mourn your long lost childhood by looking at the trains and toys of yesteryear. The toy museum boasts antique china dolls, cap guns, model ships and dollhouses. Whether you're a collector or just plain living in the past, this place is perfect for a lazy afternoon. ★

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Smile, it's Saves the Day

By Josh Orendorf

With the Sept. 16 release of *In Reverie*, Saves the Day seems to have ditched the mainstream punk sound and sliced straight into the pop jugular.

Originally signed with Equal Vision Records in their senior years in high school at the wee ages of 16, the Jersey-based quartet quickly developed as a group, releasing their debut and sophomore discs (*Through Being Cool* and *Can't Slow Down*) by June of 1999.

After surviving a near-fatal bus crash on March 19, 2000, while on tour with Blink 182, the group decided to drop Equal Vision Records and was soon after picked up by a smaller Vagrant Records. After months of rehab and lots of maturing, the group released their third and more solemn disc, titled *Stay What You Are*.

Still, something was missing. After switching labels yet again, to DreamWorks Records, and hiring producer Rob Schnapf (Beck, Elliot Smith, Guided By Voices), the band was finally able to release something uninhibited by label pressure that purely captured such a metamorphic change.

As a result, *In Reverie* is the band's most harmonic and upbeat record yet. From vocalist

Christopher Conley's sticky-sweet melodies on "What Went Wrong" to the cheesy synths on "In Reverie," Saves the Day is all about pop — and isn't ashamed to present otherwise.

But not all is major chords and sunshine for the group. Conley's existential and near-bitter lyrics are chock full of despair and cynicism which do, however, provide a sharp offset to his blissfully weedy vocals.

At their best, on tracks like "Morning in the Moonlight" and the chord-y power ballad "Tomorrow Too Late," Saves the Day manages to push a fresh approach on pretty pop melodies and perky arrangements.

It seems, however, in doing so the group has lost all intensity and weight. In fact, the one or two moments when they do

attempt to rock out, like the chorus of album opener "Anywhere With You," or on the plodding "Where Are You," they sound generically false and thin.

Nonetheless, I commend Saves the Day for making a record this pop, this melodic and this non-punk, especially when being punk is such the thing to be. I give the disc a field of flowering daises and a full-toothed smile. ★



Saves the Day 'In Reverie'

DreamWorks Records
Released Sept. 16



(out of four stars)

Photo courtesy of Touchstone Pictures

Saves the Day, from left, Eben D'Amico, David Soloway, Christopher Conley and Pete Parada, survived a near-fatal bus crash in 2000 and signed on to Vagrant Records. Now on DreamWorks Records, Saves the Day is bringing pop-punk to the masses.

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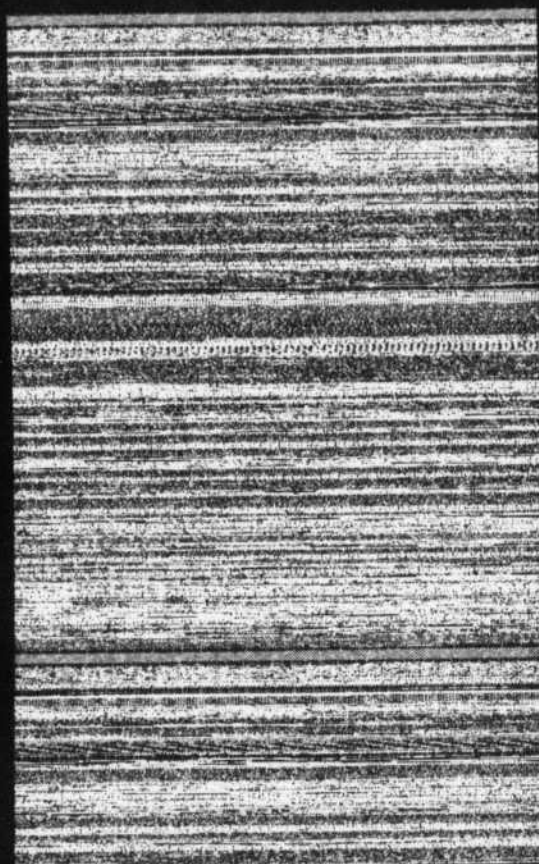
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[club listings]

Thursday, Sept. 18

3rd & Lindsley: Jeffrey Gaines, Betty Dylan, 8 p.m., \$10.

All American Sports Grill: Mass Transit, 10 p.m., \$3.

Boro Bar and Grill: The Secret Commonwealth, Fairfax, 9 p.m., \$5-7.

Blue Sky Court: Dope-A-Matic, Pacific UV, Control, 8 p.m., \$5.

The End: Sere, Derailed, Second Generation of Blue, 9 p.m., \$5.

Exit/In: Jupiter Coyote, The Loft, 8 p.m., \$9.

InfernoBar: Strutter (A tribute to Kiss), 8 p.m., \$6.

Rocketown: Royal 7, The Can Utility, Welton, 7 p.m.

Ryman Auditorium: George Jones, Georgette, 7:30 p.m., \$25.50 - 49.50

The Sutler: Dustin Overbeek, Fast Phyllis, 8 p.m.

Friday, Sept. 19

3rd & Lindsley: Super T & the Tyrone Smith Revue, 10:30 p.m., \$8.

All American Sports Grill: Mass Transit, 10 p.m., \$3.

AmSouth Amphitheatre: Dave Matthews Band, Donavon Frankenreiter Band, Marc Broussard, 7 p.m., \$38-55.

Blue Sky Court: Standing in the Shadow of the Grievous Angel - A Tribute to Gram Parsons, 9 p.m., free.

The Boro Bar & Grill: Satchal, Doc Hollywood, 9:30 p.m., \$5-7.

The End: Bombshell Crush, Bad Karma, 9 p.m., \$5.

The Muse: Bear vs. Shark, Dklimby, 7 p.m., \$6.

Red Rose: Slack, Verde, Mostly Robot, 9 p.m., \$5.

Wall Street: Foggy Bottom, Miguel, 9:30 p.m., \$5.

Windows on the Cumberland: Old Union, Gigi Dover, 10 p.m., \$5.

Saturday, Sept. 20

3rd & Lindsley: Jonell Mosser & Enough Rope, Adam Wyle, 8 p.m., \$10.

Harvey Washbangers (Murfreesboro): Don't Trust the Radio CD Release Party, \$2, 10 p.m.

All American Sports Grill: Tangent, 10 p.m., \$3.

Blue Sky Court: Futuresight, DJ's Dorian, Kidzmeal, Adam Wright, Cycle, Unborn, 8:30 p.m., \$10.

The Boro Bar & Grill: Unsound, 9:30 p.m., \$5-7.

The End: Disappointed by Candy, Friz, Sloroll, Michelle Lee, The Rich McCulley Band, 9 p.m., \$5.

The Muse: Key to the Downfall, Red Square, Chester Boom, Eleven 58's, 7 p.m., \$5.

Wall Street: Doug Hough, 9:30 p.m., \$5.

Windows on the Cumberland: Trent Summar & the New Row Mob, Dash Rip Rock, 10 p.m., \$7.

Sunday, Sept. 21

3rd & Lindsley: Willy Porter, Pete Schmidt, Bain Maddox, 7 p.m., \$7.

The Boro Bar & Grill: The McClary Brothers, Jack Pearson, 9 p.m., \$4-5.

The Sutler: Imaginary Baseball League, Puttin' on the Ritz, Adrian Matthews, 7 p.m.

Wall Street: Shoo-Fly Pie, 9:30 p.m., \$3. ★

Where to go & who to call

3rd & Lindsley: 818 3rd Avenue South, Nashville, (615) 259-9891.

12th & Porter: 114 12th Avenue North, Nashville, (615) 254-7236.

All American Sports Grill: 941 NW Broad Street, Murfreesboro, (615) 896-9661.

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'Mexico' would-be western for GenX

By Joey Hood



Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures
Antonio Banderas and the elusive Salma Hayek jump for joy (or for fear of burning their bottoms) in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*.

Freed from the poop-joke ridden *Spy Kids* series, filmmaker Robert Rodriguez rediscovers the art of exploding buildings with the overwrought travesty, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*.

For those readers lacking previous knowledge of Rodriguez's "vision," *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* is the swell-headed follow-up to 1995's ultra-cool *Desperado*, which was an Americanized rehash of low-budgeted 1992 indie, *El Mariachi*.

While *El Mariachi* and *Desperado* glided with shoestring inventiveness, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* disintegrates into Jerry Bruckheimer territory.

Rodriguez clones the patented "Bruckheimer" action figure in Antonio Banderas' "El Mariachi" character, a mesmeric renegade who smokes, shoots and likes his steaks medium rare, thank you.

And like any prime-cut Bruckheimer slab of masculinity, Banderas' Mariachi is an uncorked gun-toting vigilante in dire need of some Prozac.

Once Upon a Time in Mexico finds Mariachi understandably mourning the recent murder of his late wife (Salma Hayek, making brief appearances in hazy, flashback form) and toddler. Of course, a manipulative CIA operative (Johnny Depp) interrupts Mariachi's state of self-loathing with promises of retribution and bitchin' gun-play.

'Once Upon a Time in Mexico'

Starring Johnny Depp,
Antonio Banderas,
Salma Hayek

Rated R
Columbia Pictures
Released Sept. 12

Rating ★ 1/2
(out of four stars)

For some reason, Rodriguez juxtaposes Mariachi's Columbineless, shoot-em-up Mexico with thorny subplots involving cartel kingpins (a spray-tanned Willem Dafoe), a retired FBI agent (Ruben Blades), vampy *Maxim* eye candy (Eva Mendes) and the acting debut of cornball pop virgin Enrique Iglesias (Julio's offspring can't act either. He's two for two, kids).

And out of the excessive pile of A-listers, only Depp emerges with shameless swagger and acidic humor. Depp's Agent Sands character breathes fresh oxygen into an altogether stuffy affair. By the film's end, his off-kilter creation sutures Edward Scissorhands' sinister humanness with Michael Jackson's sinister unconsciousness.

Unfortunately, Depp's performance cannot save this debris.

"Shot, chopped and scored by Robert Rodriguez" (according to the tongue-in-cheek opening credits), *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* convulses in its boisterous stupidity. Granted, Rodriguez envisioned Mexico as an amplified spaghetti western for the MTV generation. Rodriguez succeeds in this aspect, with enough gun-play and cleavage for 50 Cent's posse.

But after 20 minutes of back-to-back explosions, you begin to wish that the film projector would imitate its on-screen counterparts. ★