



Courtesy of Touchtone Pictures

Co-stars Bruce Willis (left) and Dustin Hoffman of "Billy Bathgate" are hoping crime will pay at the box office.

Gangster movie lacks focus



"Billy Bathgate"



By Mark Nemeth
Staff Reporter

Director Robert Benton's "Billy Bathgate" (Lincoln) is a light and stylish movie about the ambitions of innocent young Billy Bathgate.

Set in New York City in the 1930s, the film stars Loren Dean as Billy, a boy impressed by the money making possibilities of working for a local gangster, played by Dustin Hoffman. Bathgate sneaks into the gangster's well-guarded place of business by holding up a sack of what the guards think to be money, but turns out to be cupcakes — the gangster boss' favorite kind. Bathgate is "hired," and begins to learn the new trade.

Hoffman is impressed with Billy's loyalty, confidence and assertiveness. Hoffman tells him he'll go far. "There's something to learn from this boy," he says to the gang's second in command.

Bathgate gets his first "paycheck" from the gangsters, securing his adoption into the gangster family.

He then buys new clothes and gives his poor mother some of the money. His absurd, pathetic-looking mother says to him, "Look at you, you're the richest man in the neighborhood," a moment that nearly pushes the movie into the realm of comical bad.

Bruce Willis plays, with little enthusiasm, one of Hoffman's gangster associates. When Hoffman discovers, through the help of Billy, that Willis is planning to double cross him for another local gang, he has him killed.

Hoffman spares Willis' girlfriend (Nicole Kidman) because he has his own romantic interest in her.

Hoffman begins to lose control of himself and his business. He irrationally kills a fire inspector, and then a business associate. Little of Hoffman's loss of control is explained, thus reducing possible sympathy for his character.

A potentially interesting relationship develops between Billy and Kidman, who the young man promises to protect. Though she calls Hoffman "her gangster," her attention goes to the young Bathgate. Billy tries to warn her against being naive about Hoffman's destructive power, but she remains unimpressed and carefree. If the chemistry of their relationship had been more developed, Billy Bathgate would be a more successful movie. As it is, it lacks focus.

Bathgate and Kidman eventually sleep together, but their relationship never matures. They do, however, vacation together in up-state New York

while Hoffman is on trial, providing beautiful footage of that part of the country.

"Billy Bathgate" fails to provide any depth because its plot lacks focus and character development. The film's strong points are in its style and recapturing of the time period, though neither excel.

Decorative movies set in the past can diffuse the viewer's identity with a character. This film may keep your interest, but the strong audience-character bonding of gangster movies like "The Godfather" or "Miller's Crossing" is nowhere to be found.



Courtesy of Touchtone Pictures

Bruce Willis decks out as gangster Bo Weinberg in "Billy Bathgate."



Robert Borzekowski/DN

Radio network to play Winnie-the-Pooh works

By Anne Steyer
Senior Reporter

Christopher Robin calls him "that silly old bear." His friends and neighbors call him "Pooh" for short. Nebraskans will get to know him by his full name this winter on KUCV (FM 90.9), with the presentation of "The Complete Works of Winnie-the-Pooh."

radio PREVIEW

Beginning Thursday, the Nebraska Public Radio Network will broadcast the program in 18 half-hour segments every Thursday at 4 p.m. The series includes 20 stories and 79 poems performed in their entirety. Sponsored by the NPR Playhouse, which specializes in national public radio drama, the program will run through December.

"The time (slot) of the program is geared to young people," said Chris Kohtz, NPR producer and host of the Morning Show. "There is definitely a need for children's programming."

Kohtz said NPR is hoping to target the after-school audience that might otherwise be watching television.

While the Pooh series is nationally produced, Kohtz said NPR also is looking to bring in locally produced children's programs.

"This is a good chance to get our foot in the door," he said.

"The Complete Works of Winnie-the-Pooh," written by A.A. Milne, has not been broadcast previously on United States national radio. This production is the only

one ever to be granted permission by the Milne estate for American broadcast.

The works are performed by Peter Dennis, a Briton who tours in a show that features a variety of Milne's works and has been lauded by Christopher Robin Milne, the author's son.

"(Dennis) performs in a very traditional story-telling fashion," Kohtz said.

The stories themselves are traditional. They are authentic Milne, straight from his books and collections of verse. Listeners who are familiar only with the Walt Disney version of Winnie-the-Pooh will hear something new, according to Kohtz.

Disney, though licensed to reproduce the Pooh characters, did not obtain the rights to the stories themselves. The audience that is acquainted only with the Disney tales will hear a different series of adventures based solely on Milne's works.

Dennis performs every character. In his dramatic reading, the voices and intonations of Pooh, Eeyore and the rest of the Hundred Acre gang are different from the Disney version. In spite of this difference, many of their characteristics are still familiar: honey-loving Pooh, bouncy Tigger, wistfully gloomy Eeyore and knowing Wise Owl.

Christopher Robin, the only human figure in the Pooh stories, presides over the animal world as the responsible adult figure.

Milne, an English dramatist, novelist and humorous journalist, initially wrote the stories for his young son, using Christopher and his stuffed animals as characters.

Elric returns in new Moorcock fantasy novel

The Revenge of the Rose
By Michael Moorcock
Ace Books

By Bryan Peterson
Senior Editor

Michael Moorcock's reputation as a science fiction writer has risen steadily for the more than 30 years he has been editing and writing.

Moorcock escaped the cult status gained with his Elric novels when "Gloriana" was published and won the World Fantasy Award, and has continued to gain readers and respect since that time.

"The Revenge of the Rose" is another novel centered around the character Elric and its publication should do even more to establish Moorcock's influence in the realms of both fantasy and science fiction.

Elric is an albino sorcerer from the

realm of Melniboné and wielder of a vampire sword which thrives on the souls of those whose blood it tastes, feeding itself and its wielder in a frenzy of death and destruction.



But Elric is no petty wielder of trite magic spells; he is engaged in a struggle between the Lord of Chaos and Lord Arioch, a rivalry which stretches across worlds and realms within what Moorcock calls the "multiverse."

Elric is no lord, but he is vital to the plans of the warring lords, for he provides access through dimensions

within the multiverse by providing a psychic path for the lords to follow in their pursuit of one another.

Alas, poor Elric has other problems as well — his father's soul is being used by one of the warring lords, and Elric must hunt across the multiverse first to find an ally, The Rose, and then to join forces with her against the forces of Chaos.

They, with temporally displaced poet Wheldrake, unite with three sword-wielding sisters who provide sources of power and help in the grand confrontation.

While the novel clearly revolves around Elric, Wheldrake is as interesting a character, perhaps even more so.

Long separated from his own time and world. His poems serve as both

history and prophecy, and sometimes both. He foretells (unknowingly) many of the novel's key events, except for his romantic rivalry with the enormous Khorghakh the Toad.

Wheldrake also makes clear that Moorcock is working with a number of classic themes and styles: trios of sisters (the Fates?), grand confrontations of Law and Chaos and a hero both epic and tragic.

The writings of Spenser, Tolkien, Homer and tellers of Arthurian legend all come to mind while reading "The Revenge of the Rose," yet while Moorcock invokes their spirit, this novel is clearly his own.

It is here that Moorcock achieves his greatest success: in building his own work upon the classic writings while invigorating and enlarging the fields of science fiction and fantasy.

Courtesy of Ace Fantasy