



Courtesy of Universal Pictures

Carlito Brigante, left, (Al Pacino), Gail (Penelope Miller) and David Kleinfeld (Sean Penn) exchange a toast to a new life in the movie "Carlito's Way."

Home video scene sees lots of action



Whew-hew, hold on to your desks, because it's a busy week for home video.

"American Heart" Where this movie was in Lincoln theaters is a mystery. Jeff Bridges stars as a hardened convict who tries to ditch his son (Edward Furlong of "T2") when released from the joint. Their relationship develops — or doesn't develop — because of Bridges' downward spiral into utter degradation. Rumor has it the acting salvages an otherwise pathetic movie.

"Cliffhanger" Sylvester Stallone climbs and crashes into mountains in this surprisingly effective action thriller. He's part of a mountain rescue unit, called in to help with a hijacked, crashed airliner.

John Lithgow is the psychotic baddie in this flick, playing a terrorist to full hilt. This is a long way from Harry and the Hendersons. "Northern Exposure" star Janine Turner costars as Stallone's former girlfriend and renewed love interest.

Formula, yes, but check out the mountain scenery.

"Free Willy" The whale movie from this summer comes home to video with a splash — bad pun intended. The big creature in captivity has been in the news since the film was a big smash, with the public clamoring for his release. It's amazing what a good public relations firm can do for both a movie and a whale's future.

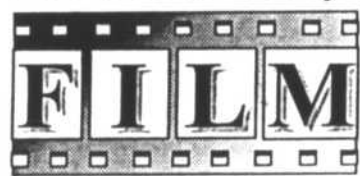
"Lost in Yonkers" Mercedes Ruehl reprises her Tony-winning role as the sweet, simple-minded Aunt Bella in this film adaptation of this award-winning play.

Written by Neil Simon, "Lost in Yonkers" takes place in a World War II-era New York City neighborhood and deals with the sometimes tragic, often humorous relationship between a simple woman and her icy mother. Richard Dreyfuss co-stars.

— Anne Steyer

Oscars could very well go 'Carlito's Way'

Acting superb in emotional story



"Carlito's Way"



It's a way of violence, a way of romance, a way of action, a way of suspense. It's "Carlito's Way."

Al Pacino plays Carlito Brigante, a Puerto Rican gangster who attempts to go straight in this very moving film directed by Brian De Palma of "The Untouchables".

Carlito is freed after serving only five years of a 30-year sentence when a technicality is discovered by his lawyer David Kleinfeld, played by Sean Penn.

Carlito, "the J.P. Morgan of smack," has had enough of criminal life and decides to retire, but discovers it isn't easy leaving the only life he has ever known.

Life in his hood has changed a lot while he's been gone. The streets

are filled with young punks with an excess of ambition and a lack of ethics. Carlito goes head to head with Benny Blanco "from the Bronx," one of these young gangsters who is determined to exceed Carlito's legendary reputation.

By rekindling his romance with his ex-girlfriend Gail, played by Penelope Ann Miller, Carlito stabilizes his life and directs himself toward a hopeful future as an owner of a car rental agency.

But his relationship with Kleinfeld threatens to pull him back down into his dangerous past. Kleinfeld asks only for a favor, but Carlito knows "a favor will kill you

faster than a bullet."

Climaxing with an action-filled chase and shootout in Grand Central Station, this movie clings to your attention with a very intriguing and violent plot.

Pacino is superb, and Miller is convincing as his stripper girlfriend. But it is Sean Penn who gives this movie its character as he plays the gang lawyer to perfection.

"Carlito's Way" is an emotional wrap-around story, punctuated with narrations from Carlito which enwrap the audience in his dream of escape — and its futility.

Watch for this film when Oscar time rolls around.

— Joel Strauch

Power of story brought to life through 'magic realism'



"Me And Kev"
Simon Black
Baskerville

This is the kind of book just bound to confuse critics, no pun intended.

It's just that we have no tradition in this country of the kind of thing this book — "Me and Kev" by Simon Black — is trying to do.

Or rather, our tradition has been very ill for a very long time.

I don't say dead. Traditions take a long time to die. But in our modern literary tradition, fantasy has a pretty bad name.

Say the word "fantasy" and you conjure up the worst kind of images: wizards with beams of blue light shining out of their fingertips, sword-wielding barbarians, hobbits.

The kind of thing it takes a genius like Tolkien to make work — everyone else will ride on his coat tails forever after.

But that's only the lowest level of fantasy. Though it can be a lot of fun, "The Sword of Shannara" is just not serious literature.

"Me and Kev" is.

And that's why the critics are

confused.

The dust jacket notes of "Me and Kev" are indecipherable. They read like a laundry list of hyperbole:

Black has "produced a first novel which defies comparison."

He's "gone beyond his literary antecedents," and his book "will incandesce the consciousness."

Is this a novelist or God almighty? I mean, he's not Kafka, after all.

What he is is a damned good novelist, working in the dead language of fantasy.

Maybe I should just stop using that word right now ... Magic realism, anyone?

The names change more to protect the innocent than to designate the trends within the genre.

Whether it's called "speculative fiction," "parable," "psychological fiction" — whatever happened to that stuff anyway? — or "magic realism," the core remains the same.

The literature of "imaginative fiction," my own name for the whole gamut of possible kinds, is intrinsically different from the literature of what arrogantly calls itself "realism."

It operates under different assumptions and different rules.

In "Me and Kev" for instance — did you wonder when I'd get down to it? — a boy might well fish a magic typewriter out of a pond, order a special typewriter ribbon that writes half in truth and half in lies and write a story

that changes things in the real world.

The power of story is great in this novel. It makes things happen. But like all writers, our hero discovers his story has a life of its own. And he finds the power of his story can be challenged by the power of another's.

Who wins depends on who tells the strongest tale — and that spells tragedy.

In some ways, the most remarkable thing about this most remarkable book is that it was published in this country at all.

It's very difficult to sell a magic realist story in America, unless your name is Garcia Marquez — it helps to be a foreigner.

So what probably aids Black most is his emphatic claim to be British — though he moved to the United States at the age of six and grew up here. He lives in England now.

The other thing that helped it slip by might be the fact that his story seems to be about mental illness.

The critics and the publishers latch on to that and say "all this magic stuff is just in that poor, sick boy's mind." They see the magic as a sign of madness, and it helps them sleep at night.

But they're mistaken. In "Me and Kev" the madness is the symbol, the trick, that allows the boy, the protagonist of this remarkable book, his remarkable experiences.

— Mark Baldrige



James Mehling/DN