

Now showing in Gainesville: 1 good, 1 so-so, 1 don't-go

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By Michael Giltz

★ ★ ★ 1/2 *Dangerous Liaisons*
Oaks Six

This is a film about everything except love. There are lovers, to be sure; as well as lust, passion, infidelity and betrayal. But love? No. There's none to be found.

The story is set in the 1700s and concerns Valmont, a rakish aristocrat played by John Malkovich with vicious charm. His sole occupation in life is the highly visible conquest of women. He is a very busy man.

Valmont is aided in his escapades by the equally rapacious Marquise de Merteuil (Glenn Close), a woman with a considerable reputation of her own and a former lover of his. It would be difficult to determine which of the two is more caustic and unforgiving, but Merteuil seems to have the edge.

"I thought betrayal was your favorite word," he notes at one point. "No, no," she responds seriously. "Cruelty. It has a nobler ring to it, don't you think?"

They are a dangerous pair, indeed, and their attention is soon focused upon revenge. Merteuil wants to humiliate a former lover who abandoned her by seeing his intended bride — a young, convent-educated woman of unquestioned virtue — debauched by the usually-willing Valmont.

However, he already is caught up in a pretty puzzle of his own. Valmont has set himself the challenge of seducing Madame de Tourvel (Michelle Pfeiffer). Madame is renowned for her high moral standing and chaste marriage, but Valmont has more in mind than simply subverting her beliefs and bedding her.

He wants Madame to maintain her religious convictions and social mores, but sleep with him *anyway*. It is a delicate balance of submission and regret that Valmont imagines will provide him with a unique and satisfying pleasure.

Merteuil is intrigued, and offers as an incentive a night with her should he prove successful. Naturally, sexual intrigue and unforeseen complications ensue as they

struggle to out-do each other in outrageous schemes.

Close and Malkovich give intimate, sharp performances perfectly suited to a world where a raised eyebrow or a veiled remark can be as deadly as any sword thrust. They delight in the shallow, brittle repartee that is the hallmark of the movie.

But it is the strength of *Dangerous Liaisons* to move beneath that amusing, entertaining surface. It shows Valmont and Merteuil in all their malice and vanity and then slowly makes us feel for them. Director Stephen Frears has always dealt in scathing, topical humor, but here he seems tempered a bit by pity. He dares us to stare into the small-minded, self-centered face of Merteuil and not catch a glimpse of ourselves.

★ ★ 1/2 *Cousins*
Oaks Four West

No one would ever accuse director Joel Schumacher of repeating himself. His diverse and largely unsuccessful list of credits include the utterly forgettable Lily Tomlin



John Malkovich and Michelle Pfeiffer pout for the camera in *Dangerous Liaisons*.

vehicle *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, the "Little Chill" teen-angst drama *St. Elmo's Fire* and the not very scary or funny vampire comedy *The Lost Boys*.

Add to that list *Cousins*, a relatively mature, romantic drama adapted from the 1975 French film, *Cousin, Cousine*. It headlines Ted Danson as Larry and Isabella Rossellini as Maria, but the real star of the film is Schumacher's direction. He shows a subtlety and eye for detail that keeps *Cousins* bursting with life and true to its European origins.

Weddings are the major catalyst

for change and they are as common as kisses here. At the first wedding, Tish (Sean Young) dallies a little too long with Tom (William Petersen). Their respective spouses, Larry and Maria, suspect something is amiss and arrange a meeting to discuss what — if anything — should be done.

What they do is fall in love. The charm of the movie lies in how they handle it. These are adults, and they devote a great deal of time and energy to thinking through their actions and how it will affect the people they love.

Maria is concerned about her

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daughter, Larry with his son and they both take great pains to treat their spouses with respect. Only Tish and Tom act truly irresponsibly and, notably, they are the unhappiest characters in a very happy movie.

Larry and Maria's tete-a-tetes are the main focus of the story, but Schumacher never lets us forget that life is going on all around them. He trains his camera on odd minor characters and intriguing faces in the crowd. The result is a refreshingly busy atmosphere.

Some of the comic diversions — such as two buddies who are losers in love and a kvetching Italian grandmother — fall flat. But more often than not, they spice up a familiar story with touches of strangeness.

Lloyd Bridges is very funny as Larry's father who enjoys life too much to be polite about his needs and desires, and Keith Coogan is hysterical as Mitch, Larry's son and a "multi-media artist with an emphasis on video and alienation."

Schumacher has jumbled his characters together with a great deal of skill and *Cousins* is alive with people. Maybe the upcoming *St. Elmo's Fire II* won't be so bad after all.

★ ★ **True Believer**
Royal Park

This is a "B" movie in every sense of the word. Like all "B" movies, *True Believer* features a convoluted but predictable plot involving corruption at the highest level, some tense action, a cynical hero and strong acting all around.

James Woods stars as Eddie Dodd, a burnt-out attorney who has gone from high-profile liberal causes to liberal uses of marijuana and slimy clients. As one of the drug dealers he defends put it: "Eddie Dodd. Everyone should own one."

Naturally, someone has to come into Eddie's life and shake him out of his lethargy. That someone is Roger Baron (Robert Downey, Jr.), a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed

youngster fresh out of law school who is willing to work for peanuts because his "life was changed" by one of Eddie's early court cases.

Roger is pampered and well-dressed, a conspicuous practitioner of conspicuous consumption. It's a nice irony of *True Believer* that the voice of social conscience for a pot-smoking '60s radical is an '80s yuppie in designer clothes. Their righteous anger is stoked by an 8-year-old murder case in which a Korean named Shu Kai Kim was wrongly imprisoned. Naturally, Eddie and Roger work for free to see justice done. Yugi Okumoto gives a tough, interesting twist to the innocent-man-behind-bars and he is just one of many fine supporting actors. Robert Downey, Jr. doesn't have much to do as the side kick, but he does it well.

The main attraction here is definitely Woods, who gives one of his more appealing and humorous performances. But even he can't make us a true believer in the hokey plot they're trapped in.

★★★★★	Stop reading this trash and get to a theater.
★★★★	Worth the \$5-a-pop evening price.
★★★	Worth a matinee price, tops.
★★	Worth renting on videocassette.
★	Worth catching on HBO, maybe.
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