

product, a dark and serious show that's being thrown into the deep end of the cable television pool on Sunday night, during the last years of the Civil war. It's the time and place depicted in Martin Scorsese's "Gangs of New York"

way, its biggest problem. The show looks good, offers a painless history lesson and has the potential to put an en-

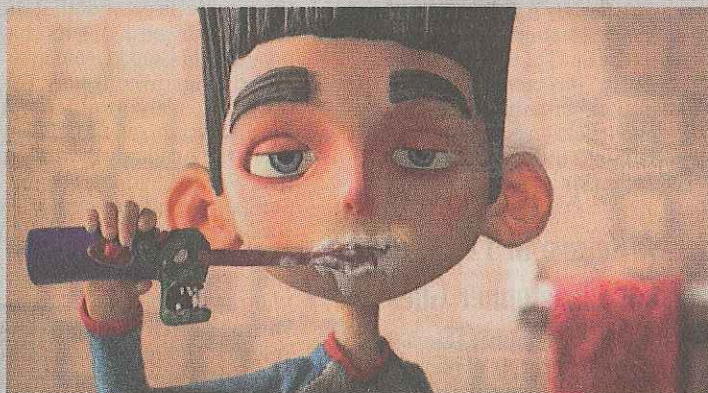
timistic American mix: a high level of sensationalistic violence, sex and all-around turpitude presented in a pack-

eting as many bank notes as they can
Continued on Page 2

MORE MOVIES INSIDE



PATRICIA KHAN/SONY PICTURES CLASSICS



FOCUS FEATURES

A. O. Scott reviews "Chicken With Plums," top, set in Iran by the creators of "Persepolis." Page 14.

Manohla Dargis reviews "ParaNorman," above, about a boy who's not like the other kids. Page 4.

Stephen Holden reviews "Sparkle," left, the last movie with Whitney Houston. Page 4.

ALICIA GBUR/TRISTAR PICTURES

Master of a Shrinking Universe

The first image in David Cronenberg's "Cosmopolis," a cold, funny number about the erotics of money and the seduction of death, is that of a chrome grille on a white stretch limousine. The shot is a close-up that's so tightly framed that the grille, with its U shape and vertical bars, looks as if it were smiling. It also looks like a shark, a perfect starting point for a story about a master of the universe who, over one long day and night, lives, eats, evacuates and fornicates in the limo. A master who, like some kind of millennial Jonah, has taken up residence in the belly of a new beast.

The limo belongs to Eric Packer (Robert Pattinson), a young money man whose mysterious ways with capital have made him so unfathomably rich that he seems to have transcended everyday flop-sweat wheeling and dealing and reached a permanent state of Zen. You first see him next to a building, as unmoving and marble white as a Greek statue (or maybe a stiff). He's impeccably dressed in a black suit and white shirt, with a meticulously knotted tie, a luxuriant slick swirl of hair and fathomless blue eyes initially obscured by dark



CAITLIN CRONENBERG/ENTERTAINMENT ONE

Cosmopolis The film, which opens on Friday in Manhattan, stars Robert Pattinson and Sarah Gadon. David Cronenberg wrote the script, based on a novel by Don DeLillo.

glasses. The world is his succulent oyster. But all that Eric wants — all that this contemporary god who lives in a tower and plays with money needs — is a haircut.

"Cosmopolis" is an extraordinarily

faithful adaptation of the not especially well-regarded 2003 novel by Don DeLillo, so it's no surprise that the movie didn't find much love when it played at the Cannes Film Festival in May. The

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Hollywood Villains Are Killing Opera

"The opera?" the main character of Kenneth Lonergan's recent film, "Margaret," sourly asks her mother. "Why are you going to the opera?"

ZACHARY WOOLFE

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

The character is just a teenager being sullen, but her question unintentionally gets to the heart of the matter. Why do we go to the opera? What are we hoping to get from it? These are crucial questions as opera companies across America, fighting the

same economic headwinds as the rest of the country, struggle simply to survive.

This art form, with its enormous casts, sets and orchestras, and its armies of stagehands and administrative staff, was a dubious financial proposition even before the most recent downturn. I was once told that the good opera company directors are those who lose money responsibly.

But there are problems deeper than financial ones with American opera, and they predated the recession by many

decades. As you look across the country, you find pockets of innovation and experimentation, but the landscape is overwhelmingly drab.

The repertory is largely stagnant, focused on the same small group of hits. The few big stars who remain — the Plácido Domingos, Renée Flemings and Anna Netrebkos — are needed to sell almost anything that is not "Aida," "Carmen" or "Turandot."

Continued on Page 2

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- Jonathan Kim, THE HUFFINGTON POST

"CHARMING...A PUCKISH, WISTFUL TALL TALE."

- David Edelstein, NEW YORK MAGAZINE

"THE MOST ENGAGING SLEEPER OF THE SUMMER."

- Leonard Maltin, REELZ

"THE SUMMER'S BEST BUDDY MOVIE."

- Eric Kohn, INDIEWIRE.COM

"FRANK LANGELLA IS A STELLAR ACTOR AT HIS MAGNIFICENT BEST."

- Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE

FRANK LANGELLA JAMES MARSDEN LIV TYLER and SUSAN SARANDON



CANNES FILM FESTIVAL/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

Juliette Binoche in "Cosmopolis." Much of the film takes place inside a limousine being driven around the streets of New York.

A Young, Stalled Master Of a Shrinking Universe

From Weekend Page 1

story is as sleek as its limo is symbolically lugubrious. While being driven around New York, a zomboid billionaire loses a great deal and, by doing so, becomes human. It's the end of the world, or at least one world, in a movie that's opaque and transparent, as well as discomfitingly real, suggestively allegorical and perversely comic, never more so than during a prostate exam that — with a snap of latex and the crown of sweat that beads across Eric's perfect alabaster head — becomes a sexualized display.

The prostate exam, like so much else in the movie, takes place in the limo. But before Eric gets in to begin his strange journey, he diffidently informs his head of security, Shiner (Jay Baruchel), that "we need a haircut." In this context the royal we is of course, preposterous, both too big for such a small desire and terribly puny for the centuries of royal prerogative that Eric evokes when he uses it. The first person plural also suggests that there's an identity crisis lurking behind those dark glasses, and that the man who will soon settle into the limo isn't a unified "I" in the familiar, comfortingly coherent Cartesian sense of "I think, therefore I am."

Eric, you see, is a contingent creation, an accretion of habits and conventions, a postmodern construction. At first he seems like a manifestation of the artist

Cosmopolis

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

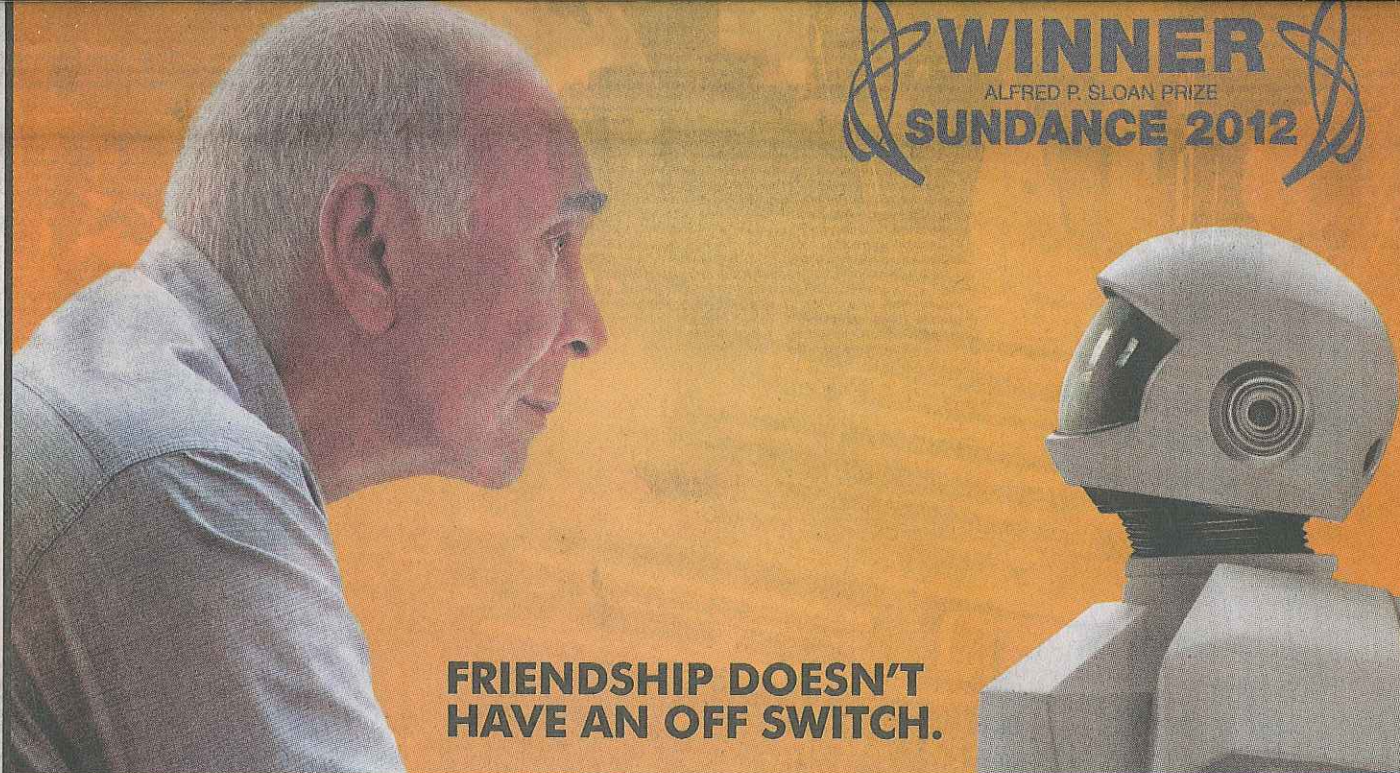
Written and directed by David Cronenberg, based on the novel by Don DeLillo; director of photography, Peter Suschitzky; edited by Ronald Sanders; music by Howard Shore; production design by Arv Grewal; costumes by Denise Cronenberg; produced by Paulo Branco and Martin Katz; released by Entertainment One. Running time: 1 hour 48 minutes.

WITH: Robert Pattinson (Eric Packer), Juliette Binoche (Didi Fancher), Sarah Gadon (Elise Schiffrin), Mathieu Amalric (Andre Petrescu), Jay Baruchel (Shiner), Kevin Durand (Torval), K'Naan (Brutha Fez), Emily Hampshire (Jane Melman), Samantha Morton (Vija Kinsky) and Paul Giamatti (Richard Sheets/Benno Levin).

whim, and while he wants more, always more, there's a sense that he's bought himself into oblivion.

A series of events, some involving the mysteriously unpredictable yuan, forcibly and with escalating violence shake Eric out of his torpor. Nearly affectless at first, Mr. Pattinson makes a fine member of the Cronenbergian walking dead, with a glacial, blank beauty that brings to mind Deborah Kara Unger in the director's version of J. G. Ballard's "Crash." Mr. Pattinson can be a surprisingly animated presence (at least he was on "The Daily Show With Jon Stewart," where he recently put in a game appearance), and he may be capable of greater nuance and depth than is usually asked of him. Certainly, with his transfixing mask and dead stare, he looks the part he plays here and delivers a physical

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like a manifestation of the artist
Barbara Kruger's brilliant 1987

**A man spends a lot
of time in a limo.
Now if he could just
get to the barber.**

commentary on consumer culture: "I Shop Therefore I Am." Eric buys and sells money, but because money has changed, the self who buys and sells it has transformed too.

"Money has taken a turn," says Eric's chief of theory, Vija Kinsky (Samantha Morton, a mesmerizing, droning delivery system), one of the handful of visitors who pop in and out of Eric's limo, dispensing bad news and aperçus. The Greeks had a word for the art of moneymaking ("chrimastiktos"), but now, she continues, "all wealth has become wealth for its own sake," and money, having lost its narrative quality, "is talking to itself."

From the way that Eric's business is quickly spiraling downward, money appears to have stopped talking to him. This may be why he wants a haircut, but only from his father's old barber, a yearning that summons up family, tradition, simplicity and those old lost days when money bought something tangible, something you could touch as effortlessly as the bristles of newly shorn hair.

Eric may work with money, but only in the most abstract sense. He doesn't move money, but rather gazes at numbers flowing on the glowing blue monitors in his limo. What's missing is the thrill of the hunt, the buy and sell, the fear and desire. He sprawls on his throne-like perch in the limo, having satisfied every

plays here and delivers a physical performance that holds up to a battery of abuses, including that prostate exam and some anticlimactic tears.

Mr. Cronenberg's direction throughout "Cosmopolis" is impeccable, both inside the limo and out. The difficulties of shooting in such a tight space, which seems to expand and contract depending on the scene (as if the car were breathing), are conspicuous but rendered invisible by his masterly filmmaking. Mr. Cronenberg keeps you rapt, even when the story and actors don't. Some of this disengagement is certainly intentional. Taken as a commentary on the state of the world in the era of late capitalism (for starters), "Cosmopolis" can seem obvious and almost banal. But these banalities, which here are accompanied by glazed eyes, are also to the point: the world is burning, and all that some of us do is look at the flames with exhausted familiarity.

Eric conducts a great deal of business inside his limo, a dark, gleaming space in which different monitors are roused to virtual life like luminous underwater creatures. The limo is an extension of Eric: it's car and carapace both, but it also provides him with literal windows onto a world that, as the day unfolds, comes ferociously, threateningly alive with anarchist protests, a vision of self-annihilation and stirrings of revolution. From inside the limo, these images surround Eric like a wraparound movie screen and can look as ersatz as the rear-projection in an old Hollywood film. Each time Eric steps outside, though, these screens fall away, and he's left in a mounting frenzy of life and death, one that affirms its reality with brutal finality.

"Cosmopolis" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). Adult sex and violence.



CAITLIN CRONENBERG/ENTERTAINMENT ONE

Robert Pattinson, seated, plays a wealthy man, and George Touliatos a barber, in this film directed by David Cronenberg.