

**The Black Dahlia.** Directed by Brian De Palma (always get him mixed up with *Louie* De Palma from *Taxi*...this guy heavy hitter, though, even if last coupla times out didn't quite catch that brass ring). Starring Josh Harnett, Scarlett Johansson (and they're an *item* now, according to *Entertainment Tonight*), Hillary Swank, Aaron Eckhart.

Great period RE-creation of a great period REC-reation: guessing what happened to the unhappy (and evidently pretty) young woman chopped in half and carved into a jack-o'lantern out in Hollywoodland where weird stuff like that there happens. The purring coupés (variously pronounced) not to mention the purring chanteuses (variously pronounced); the pleated trousers, the snap-brim fedoras; defective detectives, bruised floozies. It's what? ...1947 and it's still not fashionable to be German, so Bucky (Bucholtz...Josh Harnett, who does all right as a decent, brilliantined dumbo in wayyyyyy too deep among the swells and upon whose elegant features (as upon our doughy ones) the strain of—ouch, my head hurts!—thinking (this *is* after all and after 50 years a mystery) impresses itself and who just might be the one pretty boy to watch (if Kutcher isn't), especially since *Slevin* ...especially since Scarlett—in the flick and out—who, for her part, just might not be Madame flockin' Curie—in the flick or out) Bleichert takes a job as cop, to which salary he adds the proceeds of ham-and-egg boxing matches on the local circuit. He's a loner and unemotive kinda guy, normally a recipe for cinee-mah apnea, but Harnett manages to suggest ripples under a cool surface that nets him nevertheless the sobriquet “Mr. Ice.”

“Mr. Fire” to his “ice” takes the form of his prowler car partner and fight ring adversary Lee Blanchard (Aaron Eckhart... curiously, here, the actual German plays the Gringo while the Gringo plays the German. Eckhart >Blanchard : Harnett>Bleichert... and you wonder how come they chop women in half and carve them into jack-o'lanterns out there?). Soooooo... Fire and Ice fetch up the mission—the *obsession* actually, since the City (ptui! It's Los Angeles where all that kinda pre-versions fetch up) in the form of affable if loutish chief of detectives Mike Starr (the affable lout's affable lout: see *The Bodyguard* and *The Ice Harvest*) yanks them off the case—of winking out the crazy killer of Elizabeth Short (no joke, either... evidently that really was the real Black Dahlia's real name). Talk about your inauspicious bigscreen debuts (variously pronounced): you're the starlet gets to play the stiff (actually, Scarlett, though *more* round isn't much *less* stiff... and speaking of “stiff,” this could just be the bigscreen debut also too furthermore of the India rubber *gaudemih* ask your mom, so might wanna leave little Melissa and young Jason to home) and since it's still Hollywood(-land), we get to see her chopped up and carved into a jack-o'lantern on screen. Hillary Swank is, well... *swank* as Tiffany (or something), the spoiled heiress with the boattail Packard, into the glove compartment of which you could fit everything she remembers from Sunday School.

Blanchard and Bleichert, stumbling more or less competently in pursuit of a parolee or not with designs (literally: tattoo) on Kay or not (the pouty lips—and seriously so, up-pouted by liberal slathering of 1940's hot-poker-red lipstick—girlfriend of Blanchard or not but blooming interest or not to Bleichert, flush out a dysfunctional (read: rich and powerful) family of miscreants (ruthless dad, dotty mom, idiot younger daughter,

dropdead gorgeous if morally ambiguous elder, and we're off... Will the brunette in slinky prom dress or the blonde with the bee-stung lips snag the gun-toting felt-coif naif? Will his slicky-boy hustler bud unearth the dark secret of the Swiss family Plutocrat? Will pouty lips umph umph his little umph umph till his eyes bug out? Will the pneumatic siren in crevasse-seeking sheath umph umph his little umph umph till his eyes bug out? Will Madeline's Boo Radley of a mom turn out benign or malevolent? Will Boo Radley mom umph umph somebody's umph umph and on screen in front of God and everybody? Yeeee-uww. Will they really do the neo-clastic surgery for us, too? Yeeeeeeee-uwwwww (note extra -eee's and -uww's). You've met all the principals (and most of the principles) in this tragic opera. Who *you* think did it?

Unlike the contemporaneous (a lot like "contemporary" only, you know, uptown and movie that is "film" review-y) *Hollywoodland*, this one skates out onto that thin ice with a resolution. Don't think you're gonna like it, either, but I don't think it'll hurt to let you know that our boy and our girl do make it out when it's over, scathed but saved, one with a pouty lip and t'other with a fat one. Match made in heaven (and consummated upon earth... if *Entertainment Tonight* be believed). Umph.