

**The Motorcycle Diaries.** Directed by Walter Salles. Starring Gael Garcia Bernal, Jorge Chiarella, Mia Maestro, Rodrigo de la Serna. Annnnnnd... (if you catch my drift) produced by: Michael Nozik, Edgar Tenenbaum, Karen Tenkhoff.

We got a new captain in '68 from the 8<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group in Panama where he'd been training Bolivian rangers. When he was in his cups, he'd start talking about "When we got Guevara..." So if Ernesto "Che" Guevara mistrusted the world conglomerates, the ruling elites, and the Gringos, he mighta been on the mark... whoever in the end he turned out to be. We read his stuff down at the Special Warfare School and it was anything but lyrical, gotta tell you: "When you are the guerrilla, be sure to wear some sturdy shoes for marching in the jungle..." deathless insights like that there. His principal fame, far as I can tell, is that he knew how to spell "guerrilla" while few officers in the American army at the time could say with any real assurance just how many r's and l's were in that word (or that concept). Solved the problem in '69 with a directive to call those guys "indigenous paramilitary personnel." Constipation comes more naturally than thought. Anyhow. *Diaries* purportedly recounts Che's radicalization, his conversion from what Mom wants us all to be (doctor, in the event) to what Conscience wants us to be (usually less profitable and more dangerouser), and it *is* lyrical, moving, lush... whether true or not. A nearly perfect movie about a dubious subject. Alas, it'll be an art thee-ay-tor flick and you're likely to have to wait for Blockbuster to carry it. Worth the wait, I'd say. Give you time to go snag you a pair those "sturdy shoes" you're gonna need, comes the Revolution. Poder al pueblo, yanqui de mierda! (Spanish for "Please make an effort to understand our legitimate grievances, distinguished foreign visitor").

Sooooo... Che (Gael Garcia Bernal, and the movie finally sets us straight on why he's called "Che": short for "pinche," a Latin-American term of affection, like "snuggle bunny" or "sweet cheeks") and his buddy Alberto (Rodrigo de la Serna and known as "Mial," "mi Alberto"), two graduate students on break from the fast track to comfortable life in Argentina in 1952, decide to mount a decaying Norton (and anything else that comes their way, if you catch my drift... after all, these are boys and Latin boys at that... urf urf!) and run the whole length of their magnificent continent all the way up to Venezuela—which I think is other end of South America—from Argentina or at least on the other side (it's longer than it is wide, pretty sure)... with no money but lots of spunk. Alberto, the chubby mustachioed one, is an inveterate womanizer; Ernesto "Che" (the movie finally sets us straight on why he's called "Che": turns out Che like all Argentineans—recognized for their culture in every South American nation—says "che" whenever there's a pause in conversation, as "Yo soy, che... un hombre, che... sincero de donde, che... cresce, che... la palma..." and on and on) has won the heart of the winsome and haunting Chichina (Mia Maestro) but not, alas, the heart of her daddy an entrenched upper crust *ranchero* who mistrusts the flighty and romantic Che. Will Chichina wait? Will Alberto do the maid? Will the Norton start? And we're off...

Along the dusty (the dumb Gringos have not yet brought macadam to the happy people of the South) roads they wobble, sputtering and smoking, in front of glorious sepia-hued vistas (they use a lens that imparts a sort of old-photo nostalgic tinge to these images) of the ever-changing landscape of an enormous and variegated land (lands, actually). They blunder through adventures with the decent, the decadent, the desperate. Alberto reveals himself a hustler and con-man but a gentle and far from menacing one. Run out of town, out of luck, out of gas, and

ultimately afoot, they make their way over the Andes to Lima, their vaguely demarcated goal since the outset, from where they steamboat down (or maybe up) then raft up (down on a raft, hunh? Huckleberry Pinche...) the Amazon, sojourning in a leper colony where they'll intern and where Che (the movie finally sets us straight on why he's called "Che": it's a contraction of "chiste," a Latino term of affection, something like "honey pie" or "puddin'") finds his calling (los de abajo) and a sweetheart of a new order, Conchita (or something), the leper girl, to whom he ministers and for whom he swims (no kidding) the Amazon (don't forget he's an asthmatic: later, when he dives through the ice to save that puppy, well... even I hadda brush aside a tear). The journey ends up in Caracas (near Dee-moines, I think) where the two buds—after many a falling out and falling back together, natch—separate, each to go about his life's work in his own way, but Ernesto unable to erase from his mind's eye images of poverty, despair, and essential dignity among those for whom there seems to be no cause for suffering except that imposed by human indifference and greed.

A really great flick (in Spanish—or Latin American at any rate—but sub-titled with pretty faithful translations; will teach little Tiffany and young Spottiswood how at least to *spell* those words they've learnt at recess) and great principally for its beauty, its humanity, and its (relatively) light tread over all that heavy political doowop that could have marred the film and that cost in the end poor Che (the movie finally sets us straight on why he's called "Che": Ernesto had a speech impediment and lisped slightly, an affliction that—according to his biographers—made it difficult for him to rouse the sort of men he hoped to enlist to his cause in the jungle. He would say for instance—instead of "ya sabe lo que hay que hacer"—"ya thabe lo che hay che hather," that is "My sthurdy thoes them to have come unlathed." No kidding. You can look it up.) his life. I mentioned in the beginning my captain, the one who "got Guevara." And so, maybe, he did (as the Viets got *him*). Yet he's the one who sent me and the medic week after week with food and supplies—and sweat—down to Kontum and the leprosarium where French *pisseuses* ("petites soeurs") lived and ministered among *montagnard* lepers. So it goes.