



DARK BLUE

Kurt Russell plays a career cop with issues in this new film from a story by James Ellroy (*L.A. Confidential*). Like his earlier film, *Dark Blue* deals with the police corruption in LA, the city that defined the term in the early '90s. To make matters more pointed, the story unfolds as the Rodney King verdict — the event that turned South Central into Beirut for a week in 1992 — is about to be announced.

The film starts with Russell and partner Scott Speedman (*Felicity*) being investigated by an internal affairs unit, led by Ving Rhames. Speedman has been accused of shooting a suspect while in custody. His journey is the central arc and shows just how high up the corruption goes behind the blue wall. James Ellroy is, as always, a master storyteller about men and institutions with hearts of darkness. If *Dark Blue* does not measure up to *L.A. Confidential*'s mind-twisting betrayals, it does have its own adrenaline-fueled plot devices that will have you on the edge of your seat. And the scene of LA during the post-King riots is a car chase into hell.

—RW

AMANDLA! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony

The power of music to inspire, mobilize and ultimately initiate change is brilliantly realized in director Lee Hirsch's feature film documentary. A huge hit at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival, *Amandla!* explores the critical role played by South African freedom songs in the battle against Apartheid. With clips from underground rallies, passionate interviews, and heartfelt songs, the film covers 50 years of South African history and illustrates how resistance music evolved with the fight for liberation. World-renowned South African musicians offer their candid personal recollections, while archival footage captures the brutal arc of Apartheid and the heroism of such leaders as Nelson Mandela.

Nearly a decade in the making, *Amandla!* offers a profound glimpse into contemporary South Africa where resistance music remains a vital presence. As the film makes clear, the freedom songs that were the strongest voice of an oppressed people now serve to express the very soul of their struggle to a post-Apartheid generation. That spirit permeates South Africa. Named for the Xhosa word for "power," *Amandla's* message is universal. The power of the human spirit will prevail.

—ABB

SPIDER

Don't get sucked in by the hype: David Cronenberg is not turning into Merchant/Ivory. His newest film, *Spider*, is disturbingly eerie in a Cronenbergian way without resorting to slimy transformations, blood-oozing visuals or insects crawling around fleshy parts. The most horrific images in the film are the landscapes into which the director places his actors and the terror in Ralph Fiennes' eyes as he darts along the razors edge of reality — definitely not for the fainthearted.

Based on a book by Patrick McGrath, who coauthored the screenplay with Cronenberg, *Spider* is a dark and chilling thriller about a schizophrenic obsessed with his mother's murder. Fiennes plays Dennis 'Spider' Cleg, who has just been released from a mental institution into a halfway house (run by an unrecognizable Lynn Redgrave). As he wanders through London, Spider visits his childhood haunts and experiences a series of flashbacks about his parents (Miranda Richardson and Gabriel Byrne), which leads up to his mother's murder. Fiennes is lovingly called Spider as a child because of his penchant for collecting twine and fashioning it into elaborate webs. At first, they provide him a sense of protection — a predator's version of Linus's blanket — but ultimately they become what all webs are: a trap for prey.

The acting is terrific. Fiennes is sympathetic, yet creepy, and the balls-out talented Richardson leaps into multiple roles with the fearlessness of a high diver. The cinematography by Peter Suschitzky makes even the wallpaper scary. "I really felt this was a different kind of film" says Cronenberg, "and I would rather use wallpaper than insects to give you the interior of Spider's mind." The gross-out factor of the earlier films *The Fly* or *eXistenZ* may not be in evidence, but Cronenberg has not lost the power to make us all thrillingly uncomfortable.

—RW

THE GURU

Remember Tom Cruise's "brief" performance of "Old Time Rock & Roll" in *Risky Business*? Imagine an Indian immigrant re-creating this dance to a Hindi translation of the song, while unknowingly auditioning for a porn film. This comic warping of classic American film is at the heart of *The Guru*. The film begins with this immigrant's (Ram) child-