

ENTERTAINMENT

Ready for Halloween?

Netherworld, one of the top haunted houses in the country, has opened its doors for the scaring season. Page 22

Tech vs. Maryland

Get an early start on next Thursday's game by reading up on our next opponent. Page 31

Technique • Friday, October 11, 2002

Knockaround Guys directors create Western mob movie



By Takeshi Seida / © 2002 New Line Productions

Dennis Hopper, John Malkovich and Barry Pepper (left to right) star in New Line Cinema's drama *Knockaround Guys*. Directors Brian Koppelman and David Levien were inspired by their childhood while creating the film.

By Art Seavey
Contributing Writer

The daring duo that ventured into underground poker halls for the script of *Rounders* makes their directorial debut Oct. 11 with the premiere of the film *Knockaround Guys*. Brian Koppelman and David Levien are seasoned veterans of the entertainment world, but are still relatively unfamiliar to audiences. In the coming months, that will surely change.

Knockaround Guys, from New Line Cinema, merges the genres of Western and mob in a way that destroys preconceived notions of how awful an attempt like this could be.

"We tried to do something a little different," said Levien, "...and some people I think are gonna be like, 'Hey where's the spaghetti sauce?'"

The idea for *Knockaround Guys* came from their childhood years in Long Island, New York. Levien explained that these "wiseguys," upon

finding success, would move their family into the suburbs like most people do.

"We saw these kids with these infamous last names, and we noticed that they were regarded with like, this mixture of fear and excitement," he said.

The pair was fascinated as they watched these sons of wiseguys grow up dealing with having their fathers sent to jail, and the trouble of finding jobs due to wary employers frightened by their last name.

"For us it seemed like a lot of people in their twenties...could relate, like when you're trying to figure out your path in life and the kind of obstacles that you're facing," said Levien.

Barry Pepper plays the part of Matty Demaret, the son of Brooklyn mob boss Benny Chains, played by Dennis Hopper. Matty wants nothing more than to settle into the background and become a sports agent. His connection to his father prevents him from doing so.

He would be a part of the family business except for one deciding moment at age 13. Teddy Derserve, brought to life by John Malkovich, tries to pressure a young Demaret into shooting a snitch. Matty lacks the grit to do so and is labeled unfit for the business from then on.

The movie revisits Matty at a low point in his life. The only way he sees out is to convince his father that he is finally ready to take on a task. His father allows him to arrange the transfer of a half-million-dollar loan from the other side of the country.

Demaret enlists the help of pilot Johnny Marbles, portrayed by Seth Green, to carry out the job. Marbles flies out west and on return stops in armpit Wibaux, Montana, to refuel.

His unusual demeanor draws the attention of the local sheriff with a power complex. The money goes

missing and Marbles is rightfully scared out of his mind. Demaret and his two closest friends fly out to help. They find that the task is not a simple grab and go.

The police get involved, who are not as law-abiding as one would think, the older uncles have to be called in, and the ending, well, is not what one would expect.

Vin Diesel carries a minor role in the film. He plays the part of the group's muscle perfectly and delivers his "500 Fights" monologue with validity. He has the chance with the script to come across as a deep person with conflicting emotions and desires, but fails to do so. Diesel is simply the weakest actor in the film.

"We saw...kids with these infamous last names [who] were regarded with...fear and excitement."

David Levien
Co-Director

Andrew Davoli, who plays Chris Scarpa, a friend of Demaret and

a cousin to Marbles, brings style and grace to the film. He is a ladies man with unmistakable charisma. Davoli had a recurring role on *The Sopranos* as Dino, and has modeled for Dolce & Gabbana. He takes on a lead role in *Welcome to Collinwood* with George Clooney, due for release the same day as *Knockaround Guys*.

The screen presence of John Malkovich raises the movie to another echelon. He appeared in *Rounders*, also as a Teddy with an accent. One moment he repulses the audience as he severs the tongue of a snitch, but then he quickly wins

See *Guys*, page 22

Peachtree Playhouse scores big with Atlanta-based hit comedy

By Joey Katzen
Staff Writer

It's 8:02p.m., and I'm sitting in the fold-up chairs of this local theater hidden behind a tiny storefront next to the Vortex on Peachtree. Suddenly, the lights dim and a recently retired President Bill Clinton sounds from the PA system warning us not to crinkle Skittles wrappers or be obnoxious during the performance.

It's surreal moments like this, in combination with one-liners and slapstick effects, that pack the evening's festivities in this 13-month production run of *Peachtree Battle*.

Written, directed, and produced by off-Broadway playwrights John Gibson and Anthony Morris, this intimately-staged play introduces us to the antics of the Habershams, the uniquely Buckhead family that resides on eponymous Peachtree Battle Avenue.

The family's matriarch Trudy Habersham, played by Deborah Childs, sets out to be crowned "the most charitable woman in Atlanta" by *Atlanta Magazine*. However, the news of her favorite son Ansley's imminent marriage to a Hooters waitress risks both her award and

the family's position in Buckhead's upstanding social hierarchy.

When her openly-gay second son, hilarious lush of a mother, anorexic daughter, and black daughter-in-law-to-be enter the fray, Habersham experiences firsthand what happens as political correctness threatens to encroach her upper crust oasis.

Not to endanger the community's perception of her, this woman, whom other characters noted "once petitioned to make Buckhead a gated community," tries to conceal her concerns through a perfectly catered affair that attracts politicians, local celebrities, and strangely enough, Atlanta's homeless.

Having opened September 2001, *Peachtree Battle* is now the longest-running comedy in Atlanta history, playing in the city's first and (for the short future) only extended-run theater. With every night sold out since this month last year, finding a ticket into this 121-seat theater often requires reservations several months in advance.

And unlike more traditional venues, the self-proclaimed "urban theater" Peachtree Playhouse has no lobby, posh chairs, or concession booth—instead, it's connected to the Vortex Bar and Grill, and the

proprietors encourage patrons to walk through a concealed passageway to the adjacent restaurant to retrieve martinis and soft drinks before the show.

In retrospect a morality tale, *Peachtree Battle's* flawless characterization, diverse ensemble cast, and zany script leave audiences covering their mouths in entertained disbelief of what is said by the actors in front of them—that is, when viewers have enough time to react in between minutes-long stretches of oxygen-withholding laughs. In addition, though unusual for a run of this length, five of the eight players in the show have been around since the beginning.

It's unfortunate, then, that some of the actors occasionally lacked the perfect timing one would expect after having so much practice. The script was hilarious and the acting was generally top-notch, but in a few situations the pauses in dialogue lasted a little too long, and once or twice the slapstick routines appeared too deliberate.

Despite the few hiccups to be expected in an informal theater operation like this, *Peachtree Battle*

See *Battle*, page 21



Photo courtesy of Peachtree Playhouse

Ansley Habersham (seated left, Micah Osborne) prepares his fiance, Tiffani Storrs (seated right, Sherita Starks) to meet his shocked family.

Netherworld Haunted House ranks among the best in the nation



Photo courtesy of Netherworld Haunted House

Several performers at Netherworld take a break from their scaring duties. Netherworld Haunted House, located in Norcross, opened last month.

By Bryan Basamanowicz
Senior Staff Writer

So the story goes that a slightly deranged scientist at an asylum was working on a new experiment to extract the deepest fears from the minds of madmen into living reality. The scientist assumed that these demons from the darkest parts of the imagination would be easily disposed of once separated from their creators.

But of course there was no such luck, and a good thing too, because without these unsightly demons, Netherworld, one of the top ten haunted houses in the nation, would not be here in Atlanta.

With a staff/cast of over fifty, Netherworld has been haunting people throughout the Halloween sea-

son for the last six years. Netherworld opened on Friday the thirteenth of September and will be running until November 3. Now, with the big date looming less than a month away, Netherworld



is open daily from 7p.m. until 11p.m., Sunday through Thursday, and from 7pm to midnight on Friday and Saturday.

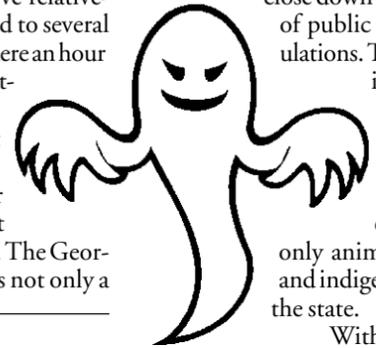
Usually, even on its busiest days, the lines move relatively quickly. As opposed to several other haunted houses where an hour to two-hour wait is expected, Netherworld gets you into the house after about a twenty minute wait.

The location for Netherworld could not have been better chosen. The Georgia Antique center offers not only a

vast amount of free space to stage the operation, but also contributes a sullen, stagnant atmosphere—perfect conditions for demons and ghosts.

Netherworld offers a different theme each year. This year's theme is the horrible mishaps of Dr. Randolph Vargas, a scientist and the founder of Inner Sanctum Inc.

Inner Sanctum is a mental illness treatment foundation "dedicated to aggressively treating the most severe forms of mental illness." The foundation's bizarre practices have, on several occasions, nearly had them



close down on account of public health regulations. Their experiments are so controversial that they have been limited to testing only animal subjects and indigent wards of the state.

With the good intentions of curing the mental illnesses of his patients, Vargas has devised a machine called the Preatorious Insinuator Mark 7 that "extracts a madman's greatest fears and gives them flesh." So that can't be good.

The walk through takes you both through the asylum where Dr. Vargas's patients have come to call home, and the house beyond where their now-living nightmares have settled in for residence.

This year, Netherworld is offering an additional walk through feature called "House of Creeps in 3D." The "House of Creeps" impressively combines horrific 3D visual and audio artistry in combination with the standard workings of a Haunted House. Among the features this year at the "House of Creeps" are an actual alien autopsy, a Macro Virus exposition and something scary that has to do with clowns.

The price you pay for admission into Netherworld \$13 for entry into the Inner Sanctum or \$20 for admission into both the Inner Sanctum and the House of Creeps.

Visit www.fearworld.com/netherworld.htm for more information.

Technique Crossword: Back to Basics

By Joey Katzen
Staff Writer

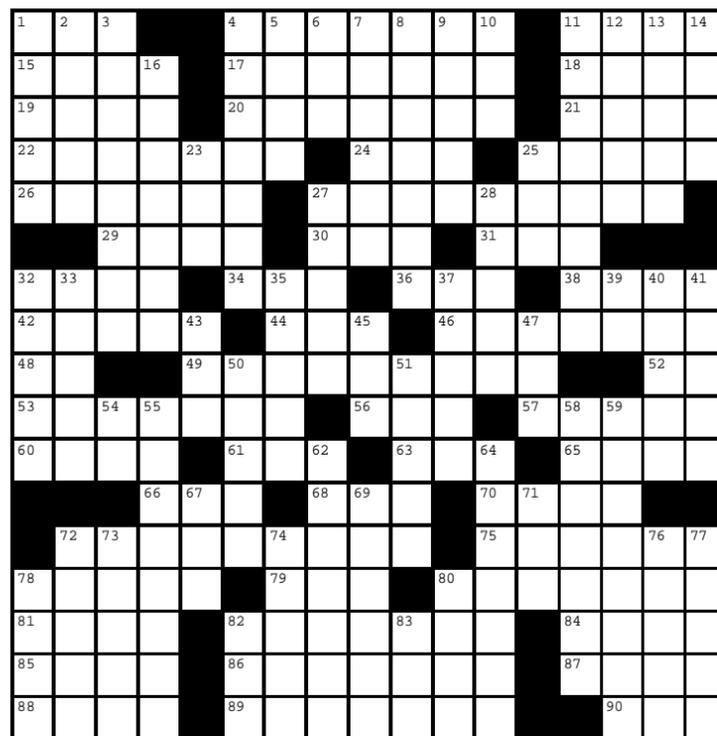
Across

1. ___ Lanka
4. Country simpleton
11. Recedes
15. Offer a hand
17. More tiny
18. Be strong, to Brutus
19. Aha! instigator
20. Detached
21. Chill
22. Bitterly sarcastic
24. Sajak of Wheel fame
25. One of Silent Bob's friends
26. Intact
27. It can be halogen or incandescent
29. Birth of a Nation actress
30. Much ___ About Nothing
31. N Amer. Country
32. Winter holiday on AOL IM
34. ___ it isn't so.
36. Rhinestone or ruby
38. Comprehensive quiz
42. Part of an Arnold quote
44. Dispenser candy
46. Dressing component
48. Off alternative
49. Javert frustration
52. A beehive, for instance
53. Parisian survey

56. Paper source
57. Transmit electronically
60. Commedia dell' ___
61. Cleopatra killer
63. Sebastian's home of song
65. Cain's captive
66. Soviet satellite
68. Cheap dye
70. Party or aid preceder
72. Pompously impressive
75. Quartz compound
78. Guggenheim Bilbao architect
Gehry
79. Shaft do, for short
80. Marijuana sometimes, in California
81. Fountainhead framer
82. 1001 nights, once
84. Philosopher Immanuel
85. Border on
86. Enormous
87. Sicilian mount
88. Bambi, for instance
89. The afterlife (arch.)
90. Corn unit

Down

1. Nickelodeon goo
2. Chem I reaction
3. Helium or Neon
4. Statue of Liberty base
5. Certainly not a word
6. ___ a wrap
7. Idiomatic
8. Eager
9. Under or be suffix
10. Former NHLer Bobby
11. Appraise
12. Boiled O-bread
13. Sound byte
14. Hide-and-go-___
16. Nonsensical artist
23. Quest. reply
25. 48 Hours home
27. Cake level
28. Bombastic
32. South African
33. Jane Austin estate house
35. After, to Marie
37. Avoid
39. i.e. or n.b.
40. Backwoods feminist Hawkins, of dance fame
41. Imp
43. Rhyme scheme
45. File store option
47. Born
50. FDR Veep H. ___ Wallace
51. Indian class
54. Obsolete Windows variety
55. Summoner
58. Human
59. Leave the throne
62. Assess a price proportionately
64. Attendance SNAFU
67. Pen cartridge contents
69. Pressure line



71. Help out
72. Slope
73. Possible y-values
74. Final Fantasy guardian force
76. Pot plant, for short
77. Church platform

78. Mr. Rogers
80. Pleiades star
82. Consumed
83. Motor hotel

Solutions on page 23

Battle

from page 19

succeeds without question. Its jokes are funny and its theme memorable. Beyond these features, it prides itself on its Atlanta references, naming most of the characters after Atlanta neighborhoods and roads (Candler, Sherwood, Ansley, Wicua and Holcomb) and inserting a number of sideline jokes that longtime residents certainly appreciate.

Those not natively of the area

still left the theater entertained and fulfilled by the experience, though a number of them could be seen throughout the performance nudging their chortling neighbors to inquire about the Hartsfield dirt contract or a supposedly corrupt superintendent of a local school district.

During this performance, most attendees appeared to be OTP ('outside the Perimeter') residents who had driven in to experience the ur-

ban surprises of the city, though one could spot a smattering of young intowners and college students on the seat risers.

Peachtree Playhouse may be the first extended-run theater in the area (meaning shows don't have to declare a closing date when they reserve the space—they may stay as long as they're able to sell tickets), but it apparently will not be the last.

The writers of the play (who also happen to own the theater) plan to

open another venue, the Ansley Park Playhouse, on Peachtree across from the Equifax building north of the High Museum.

It will be showing another of the writers' plays, *The Limousine Ride*, chronicling the conversations of four recent first ladies as they are forced to share a limousine.

Peachtree Battle currently runs through May 2003 at the Peachtree Playhouse, and *The Limousine Ride*

opens Oct. 18 at the Ansley Park Playhouse. Tickets for each show, which run Thursday through Sunday nights, are \$23.50. They are available at www.peachtreeplayhouse.com or by calling 404-875-1193.

Occasionally, half-price tickets are available the day of the performance from the AtlanTIX ticket booth at Underground Atlanta. For more information about ticket availability, check out the AtlanTIX website online at www.atlantaperforms.com.



By Takeshi Seida / © 2002 New Line Productions

Andrew Davoli (left), Vin Diesel (background), and Barry Pepper (right) team up in a mob plot to transfer half a million dollars across the country.

Guys

from page 19

them back by showing compassion for a young Matty Demaret.

The directors, Koppelman and Levien, met as teenagers in Kennedy Airport attending a school trip. They became instant friends. Over the years the two have practically become brothers. "We grew up watching all the same movies, and sharing an interest in books and music. About the only thing we didn't share was the same girl," said Koppelman.

This special relationship aided them in writing, directing and producing *Knockaround Guys*. "For us, we had a really shared vision of the thing. We wrote it together and we knew what we were looking for," said Levien. "And we really do have a shared language, so that we can look at each other and know," added Koppelman.

Prior to this production, they had solely worked as writers. The transition to directing was a relatively easy and welcome change. "It was hard in some ways, but it was

natural because it's just telling the story... You just have a whole different set of tools: you have the sound track, the music, the sound effects, you have the camera work, the way you wanna light a scene. Suddenly you just have all kinds of other things

"We went to Montana and drove around for a week and felt what it was like to be outsiders."

Brian Koppelman
Co-Director

at your disposal other than the page to try to get the story across," said Levien.

Exhaustive research has become the trademark of their productions. "We spent a lot of time with wiseguys we could find... We went to

Montana and drove around for a week and met sheriffs and deputies and felt what it was like to be outsiders."

Diesel's character rents out illegal video game machines, so the two directors went on collection runs with his real-life analogue. "He's exactly like the Vin character, and also a guy who was very connected to organized crime, but was Jewish like Vin's character and so can't get ahead in that world," said Koppelman.

Koppelman and Levien have a true passion for their work and a talent to convey their stories. Their upcoming projects include *Interview with the Assassin*, concerning the J.F.K. murder, which is due out November. They have also written a screenplay based on John Grisham's *The Runaway Jury*, which has just started production. *Knockaround Guys* brings together exceptional talent in front of and behind the camera. Don't expect to see it bring in any awards, but it should stand out in this slow fall season.

