



You can lose yourself in London

'Somers Town' reflects director Shane Meadows' deep understanding of aimless, alienated youth

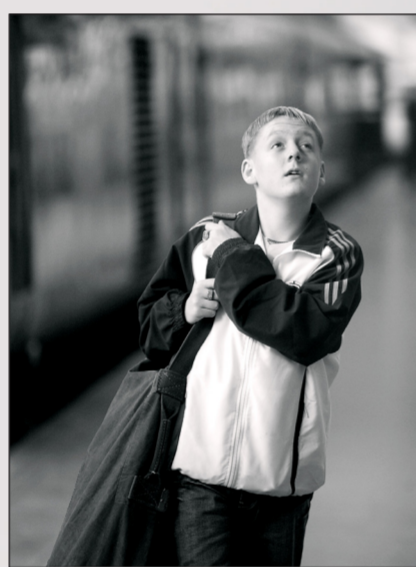
BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

After his powerful study of alienation and skinhead culture in *This is England*, Shane Meadows' *Somers Town* might come as a bit of a letdown. It's shot in black and white, runs for a mere 75 minutes, and is not really about anything at all. Just two lads in London, one a runaway from the Midlands, the other the son of a Polish construction worker, getting up to some high jinks because they have nothing better to do.

Despite it being a comparatively slight work, *Somers Town* reflects Meadows' deep understanding of youth set adrift in a world that has no obvious place for them. According to *Variety* magazine, the film was financed by Eurostar, and the London-Paris service and the new terminal at St Pancras are prominent both physically and as a narrative backdrop to the story. There are brief moments when the director's responsibilities to his sponsors intrude ever so slightly, but Meadows has too clear a conception of what he wants to allow *Somers Town* to descend into a piece of extended product placement.

Thomas Turgoose, who made a stunning debut in *This Is England*, is back as Tomo, a runaway from the Midlands who is trying his luck in London. He is far from being a likable scalawag, and is clearly a grifter to his bones, never missing an opportunity to see what he can get out of even the most casual of contacts. He meets up with Marek, who is in London to spend time with his father, a worker on the new Eurostar terminal. Marek too is at a loose end, as his father works days and drinks away the night with mates.

The relationship between the boys is



Thomas Turgoose, above right and below, and Piotr Jagiello, above left, star in *Somers Town*, directed by Shane Meadows. PHOTOS COURTESY OF FILM



Film Notes

SOMERS TOWN

DIRECTED BY: SHANE MEADOWS

STARRING: THOMAS TURGOOSE (TOMO), PIOTR JAGIELLO (MAREK), ELISA LASOWSKI (MARIA), PERRY BENSON (GRAHAM), KATE DICKIE (JANE)

RUNNING TIME: 75 MINUTES

LANGUAGES: IN ENGLISH AND POLISH WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

never quite easy, even though Tomo talks his way into bunking in Marek's room without his father's knowledge. The relationship is enlivened by Graham, a shady businessman who is constantly sorting through his garage filled with assorted goods of unclear provenance, and Maria (Elisa Lasowski), a French woman working in London who becomes the object of a romantic fantasy for the two lads.

The surface lightness hovers over a darker world that is acknowledged but then generally ignored. Instead of drifting into the world of street violence, as Turgoose's character did in *This is England*, the lads are allowed to create an ephemeral paradise amid the rough streets of inner city London. Short as it is, *Somers Town* has plenty to enjoy, not least Meadow's outstanding ability to capture the elusive mood shifts and listless enthusiasms of his two young leads.

OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Taken

The latest action flick from French writer-producer Luc Besson is notable for enjoying sustained box office success in the US nearly two months after its release. Liam Neeson is a former US spook who comes to the rescue of his kidnapped daughter, now apparently bound for a Middle Eastern harem. Carnage follows in his wake as he puts paid to his mid-life crisis — as well as a white slavery network. Sensitive souls might find this one a little hard to watch in the next few weeks given the sad fate of Neeson's real-life wife, Natasha Richardson.



Young@Heart

Genuinely emotion-filled release of the week is this British documentary from 2007 about a choir of senior citizens with an average age of about 80 and who specialize in modern, rock-oriented fare. It follows their rehearsals, a number of individual stories and the last-minute deaths of choir members before closing with energetic performances. Winner of several awards, this film has real heart and has left audiences teary and delighted at the same time.



Make It Happen

Poor reviews in Britain and Australia may have helped keep this formulaic aspirational teen dancer movie from a US release, but Taiwanese youngsters besotted with dancing might find something of interest, though even they might be disappointed at the number of dance sequences on show. Mary Elizabeth Winstead (Bruce Willis' daughter in *Die Hard 4.0*) is a rural lass dreaming of entering a Chicago dance academy, but has to triumph the hard way, etc etc.



Stars on Earth

Bollywood identity Aamir Khan directs this drama from 2007 about a precocious but dyslexic and misunderstood child whose condition is recognized by a sympathetic teacher. Not many Bollywood features reach Taiwan, and this one is rather atypical, though its length (more than two-and-a-half hours) is not. Child actor Darshheel Safary has impressed many with his lively performance. Also known as *Little Stars on Earth* and *Taare Zameen Par: Every Child is Special*.



Homeless Boy

Based on a best-selling autobiography, *Homeless Boy* is the latest import to coincide thematically with the economic crisis. The boy is Hiroshi, whose already depleted family suffers a double blow when they are evicted and the father leaves the kids behind. Hiroshi follows suit and hits the streets, but, as the *Japan Times* observes, his fate is far kinder than most street people might experience, and casting an overaged pop star in the role hardly helps. This is no *Vagabond* or *Pixote*, then, but most of the kids who see this feel-good flick will probably be grateful for that.



Kamome Shokudo

In a treat for fans of Japanese cinema and the offbeat, the Spot theater in Taipei is screening the two most recent films from Japanese writer-director Naoko Oigami. *Kamome Shokudo* (2006) follows the exploits of three Japanese women in Finland who end up working at the restaurant of the title. Quiet, subtle and charming, this film can be added to the list of fine features over the years that have seduced audiences by prominently featuring good food. Also known in English as *Kamome Diner* or *Seagull Diner*.



Megane

In *Megane* (2007), Oigami sets the action much closer to home, though still rather remotely for most Japanese. Okinawa offers another space for older Japanese women to experience life as it isn't lived back in the suburbs, and the results are equally quirky and slightly surreal. Their adaptation process and the eccentric locals in this case have hints of that underwatched British classic, *Local Hero*, and with a psychological payoff to match. English title: *Glasses*.



Clash of the monsters

Everybody knows you can't keep a good werewolf chained up for long, even if you're a cruel aristocratic vampire from the Dark Ages

Film Notes

UNDERWORLD: RISE OF THE LYCANS

DIRECTED BY: PATRICK TATOPOULOS

STARRING: MICHAEL SHEEN (LUCIAN), BILL NIGHY (VIKTOR), RHONA MITRA (SONJA), STEVEN MACKINTOSH (TANNIS) AND KEVIN GREVIOUX (RAZE)

RUNNING TIME: 92 MINUTES

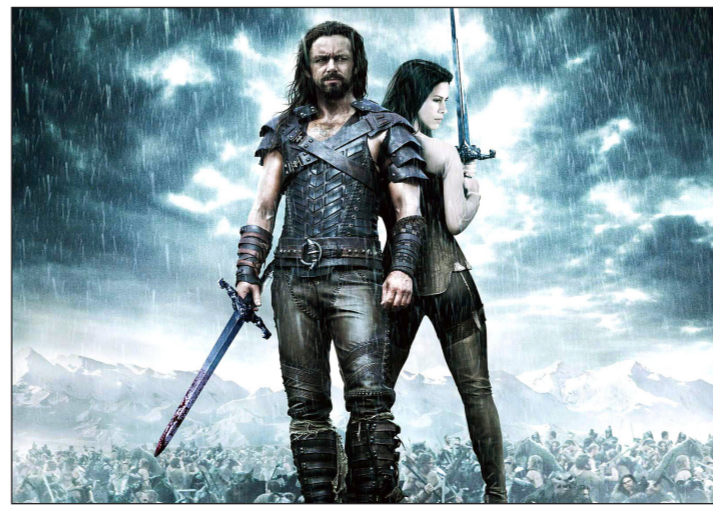
TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

BY MANOHLA DARGIS
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK
Tricked out in leather and heavy metal hair, the British actor Michael Sheen takes a lively break from his usual high-crust duties to bring wit, actual acting and some unexpected musculature to the goth-horror flick *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans*. The film, a prehistory to the first two *Underworld* movies, rewinds time to when the werewolves, or Lycans, led by Lucian (Sheen), began rattling the chains clamped on them by their vampire masters, a louche crowd that answers to Viktor (the British actor Bill Nighy).



Bill Nighy, above, Michael Sheen, right, and Rhona Mitra, far right, star in *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans*. PHOTOS COURTESY OF SONY

Set primarily in the lair of the vampires, a dark castle bathed in moon-blue light and dappled with pools of black shadow, the film offers few surprises other than Sheen's vigorous, physical performance. Although the



presence of Sheen — who can be seen twinkling as David Frost in *Frost/Nixon* and is probably best known for playing Prime Minister Tony Blair in *The Queen* — is initially distracting, it soon becomes the movie's greatest asset. There is, as it turns out, some benefit to having a real performance even in a formulaic entertainment like this, as shown by Sheen's commitment here and by the lackluster star turn of Kate Beckinsale in the previous movies. Unlike Nighy, who puts an amusing camp spin on his every line and gesture, Sheen appears to have taken his monster duties

seriously: his eyes pop with menace, and he howls up a mighty storm. Though the director, Patrick Tatopoulos, clearly likes the looks of the female lead, Rhona Mitra as Sonja, Viktor's daughter and Lucian's lover, he gives Sheen plenty of face time. The actor's value is particularly evident during the various fight sequences, which — because they are underlighted and, as is too often the case in contemporary genre cinema, overedited — come across as needlessly chaotic. It's at moments like these that Sheen's bright eyes become beacons, two points of light in the murky dark.