

Film

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN

Director: Hector Babenco

Two men share a cell in a South American gaol. Arregui (Raul Julia) is a tough and embittered Marxist whilst his companion Molina (William Hurt) is a prissy, effeminate homosexual. The clash between their two personalities is the pivot around which Babenco has fashioned this study of obsession, illusion and loyalty.

The director made his mark in 1981 with the startling *Pixote*, its Sao Paulo reform school providing a microcosm of the more general Brazilian corruption. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is set in an unidentified Latin American country, much of the action taking place within the men's prison cell. The political oppression and violence of the outside world is revealed through the beatings and tortures administered by the prison authorities.

The claustrophobia of *Spider Woman* is inescapable. As in the original novel by Manuel Puig, it is the couple's verbal sparring match which provides the main momentum of the film. But claustrophobia is more than merely being trapped within the four walls of a prison cell. Arregui and Molina are caught within the limitations of

their attitudes and lifestyles: their passionate truce at the end of the film being all the more ironic when one considers the various betrayals that provide the undercurrent for the film.

The structure of the movie is an unusual one: the prison dialogues are punctuated with scenes from imaginary 1940s movies — the realisation of Molina's obsessional recounting of melodramatic film scenarios. The films-within-a-film provide an eerie parallel to the present situation of the two men and Sonia Braga's extremely arch playing as Leni Lamaison, the French cabaret singer caught between the Nazis and French resistance, is the perfect compliment to Molina's resolutely campy turn-of-phrase ("her petite ankle slips into the perfumed water" is one specimen).

The shock of the final moment of violence is considerable and much of the credit goes to William Hurt's superb performance as Molina, a performance that won him the Best Actor's Award at last year's Cannes festival. Unexpected casting for Hurt (his previous films have been Russel's *Altered States* and Kasdan's *The Big Chill*), he plays Molina with a fierce intelligence and admirable control, easily manipulating the audience's sympathies through his expert development of the character over the course of the film. Despite our initial misgivings, we end up feeling for this window-dresser drawn

against his will into a web of political intrigue, finally attaining his own sort of nobility.

AGNES OF GOD

Director: Norman Jewison

Things have not been the same at the convent since Mother Ignatius told it all... John Pielmeier's original Broadway play *Agnes of God* played with the dualities of mystery and mysticism. Agnes, a young novice (Meg Tilly in the film) is investigated by forensic psychiatrist Martha Livingstone (Jane Fonda) for her part in the murder of a new-born child in the convent. Fonda struggles stoically, in spite of the protestations and obstructions put up by Anne Bancroft's Mother Miriam Ruth, a distinctly Jewish Momma Superior, and one who can kvetch with the best of them ("Dr Livingstone, I refuse," she quips to Fonda at one point in the film).

The original play was written for these characters alone, using the one set, and it worked as a dramatic piece of some intensity. Now, radically opened up with scenes in barns, towers, courtrooms, it loses a lot of its former concentration. The move to Quebec seems to provide little purpose except to provide Sven Nykvist, Bergman's cameraman, with the opportunity for some rivetting images.

Jewison is still unable to resist the lure of pure corn — a shot of the sun bursting out from behind

the clouds after Agnes's confession or Jane Fonda's final wrap-up voice-over at the end of the film. The performances of the three actresses are what remain with one after the final credits. Not so much Jane Fonda taking her usual earnest stance, but rather Bancroft's bristling energy and mercurial mood changes as Mother Miriam Ruth and the glowing truth that Meg Tilly gives to the central role of Agnes.

WHITE NIGHTS

Director: Taylor Hackford

While one might almost forgive the embarrassing anti-Russian philosophies of *Rambo*, with its comic-book, outrageously biased approach to its subject matter, it is considerably less easy to accept the same sentiments in Hackford's new movie, dressed up with lashings of "culture" and a syrupy Lionel Ritchie theme song.

Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gregory Hines are, in their respective fields, superb dancers, yet *White Nights* gives them but little opportunity to display their talents in this area. By the same token, Geraldine Page and Helen Mirren are stylish actresses and yet the material given to them on this occasion is negligible to say the least. The lachrymose Isabella Rossellini takes far too much of the screen time and it is hard to believe what persuaded the Polish director Jerzy Skolimowski to play the heavy of the piece — the

suave Colonel Chaiko.

But, political issues aside, together with the criminal misuse of so many talents (cinematographer David Watkin and choreographer Twyla Tharp can be added to this list), a film which has some pretensions to being a thriller could well afford to have at least half and hour trimmed off its quite excessive running time.

WILLIAM DART

Video

Roadshow heads the list of recent video releases, with big Arnie Schwarznegger as an android in *The Terminator* and Woody Allen as a bumbling theatre agent in his charming *Broadway Danny Rose*. Other releases include the horror movies *The Haunted Palace* (with Vincent Price, 1963) and *The Filth Floor*, and *KGB: The Secret War*.

CBS/Fox offers *Turk 182*, starring Timothy Hutton of *The Falcon* and *The Snowman* fame. There's also the comedy *Smorgasbord* (starring Jerry Lee Lewis, Milton Berle and Sammy Davis Jnr), *C.H.U.D.* (cannibals in the sewers of New York!), the romantic *Ladyhawke*, *The Baron and the Kid* (starring Johnny Cash as a pool player), *The Burning Bed* (Farrah Fawcett in a dramatic role as a battered wife), and the suspense-horror *Scared To Death*.

Palace video releases include *Blood Feast*, the work of cult horror director Herschell G. Lewis, and Britt Ekland getting tacky in *Erotic Images*.

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension (Roadshow)

Wow, I wish I had written this one. A film hot on the trails to oblivion — just too wild and far gone daddy for words.

Here's the plot: Buckaroo Banzai is a multi-media star, comic book hero, scientist and brain surgeon. He breaks through to the 8th dimension in his jet car (a customised Ford) and discovers aliens. There are good aliens and bad ones; the good ones (sort of good, but not too nice) are black and the bad ones are white and racist. The "good" aliens blackmail Buckaroo and his followers (The Hong Kong Cavaliers) to help them, by placing an atom bomb above the earth, and if he doesn't stop them — bye bye World.

Now all the aliens are called John and came to Earth on Halloween 1938, the same day Orson Welles (well-known computer salesman) did his famous 'War of the Worlds' broadcast. You see, Orson was telling the truth, but the aliens brainwashed everyone. Wonderful stuff!

The aliens set up the 'Yo-Yo Dine' company as a front (Yo-Yo Dine features in Thomas Pynchon's book *Crying Of Lot 49*, which has nothing to do with the film, but shows that the scriptwriters did English Lit. at Yale.) and attempt to use Mr

Banzai's "over-thruster" to break back into the 8th dimension.

Banzai and the Cavaliers fight the aliens and save the world. Lots of other things happen to make this one hell of a wild ride through the mind of a Hollywood scriptwriter.

Warning: Don't drink or take drugs before watching. KB

The Last Metro (Palace Academy)

Francois Truffaut died last year, leaving behind a body of work stunning and beautiful. From his early writhings in *Cahiers du Cinema*, dealing with "la politique des auteurs", re-assessments of Hollywood directors like Ray, Fuller and Ford, and his first perfect films like *Tirez sur le Pianiste* and *Jules et Jim*.

He leaves us with *The Last Metro*, which carries all the familiar touches of his other films, the fine handling of the dialectic between genre and auteur, the concentration on the micro rather than macropolitical system, and that particular French sense of reserve and stylistic modesty.

In this film about the Nazi occupation of Paris, Truffaut tells a story about the love affair between a husband and wife, and the wife's lover, set against the struggle of a theatre remaining open against censorship and discrimination against Jews. The theatre becomes a metaphor for Truffaut's theme of resistance, be it against fascism or dangerous desires.

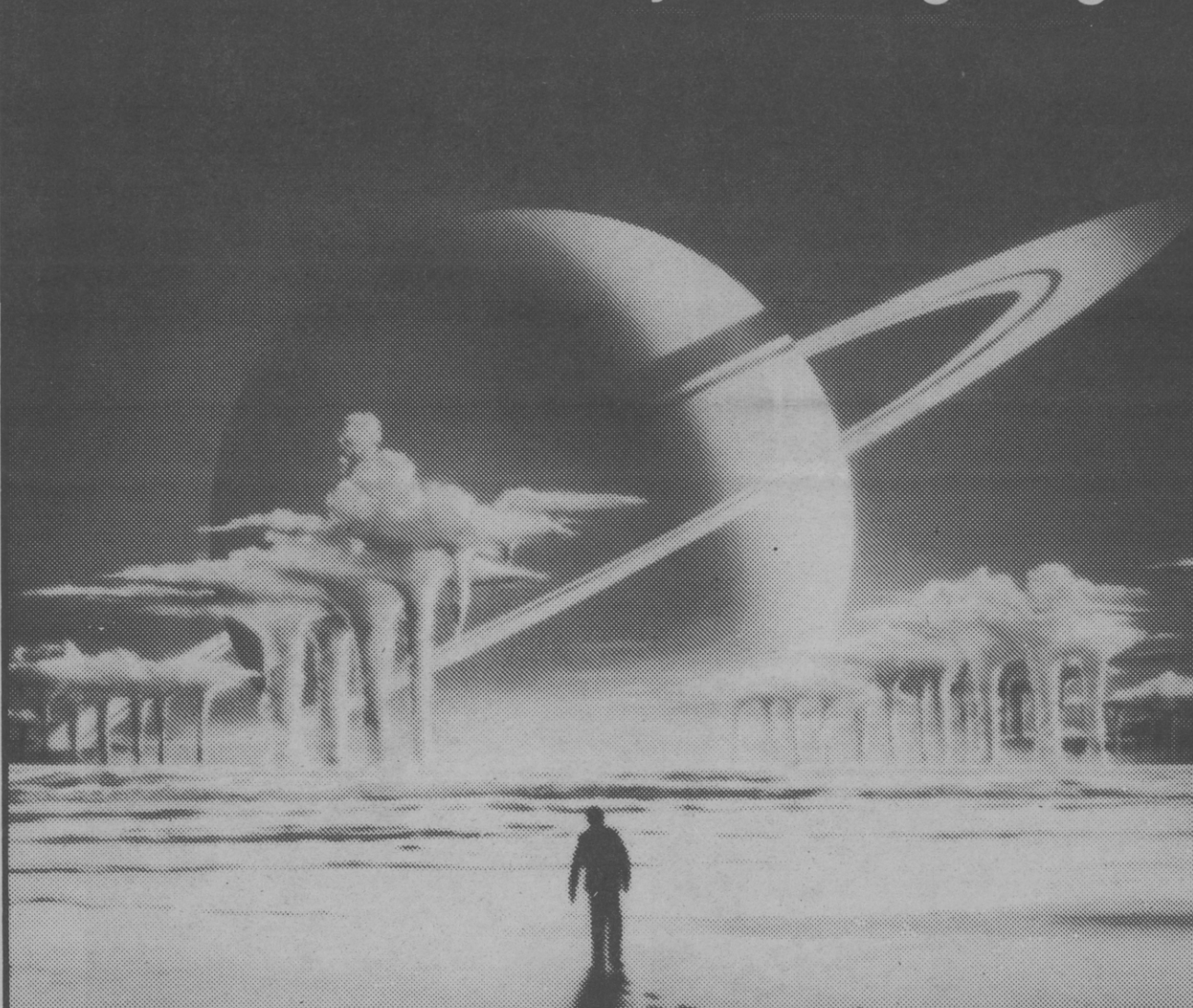
Both Catherine Deneuve (heroine of Bunuel's *Belle de Jour*) and Gerard Depardieu give wonderful performances in a rich and important film. If you think *Bolero* is a good example of French filmmaking, you're sadly mistaken. Watch Truffaut for his art and compassion and forget about that particular trans-continental soap opera. KB

'RUMOURS' FROM PAGE 6
the old Sheaf nightclub, which has been renamed the **Flying Ballroom** for the occasion... the **Cricketers** will also have a very interesting programme running through the two week period of the festival, including **Roy Harper**, known for his session work with the likes of Jimmy Page and as a solo artist in his own right.

The **Manson Family** are a new band... **Eye-Time Entertainment** have an ambitious two nights at the Student Union Hall, Victoria Uni. Fri-Sat 14-15 will see up to 20 different acts from around the nation, a diverse bag including **Dread Beat & Blood**, **Purple Siren**, **Go Go Yetis**, **Jungle Mice**, **Otis Mace**, **Primates** and **Flesh D-Vice**. Organisers see the event as a debut for Eye-Time and further events are planned throughout the year.

Flesh D-Vice have just completed their first independent video, made by a team of up 'n' coming film-makers and to be shown with the release of a new single... the **Tomboles** will be busy playing various venues around the country and are to record new material.
Gerald Dwyer

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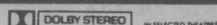


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