

Fatal Attraction Glenn Close —but no cigar



by Ian Johnston

Fatal Attraction, the steamy new thriller by director Adrian Lyne (9 1/2 Weeks) contains too many obvious plot turns and too much heavy-handed symbolism to be considered an unqualified success. But it still is a watchable, even exceptional suspense film.

Fatal Attraction begins innocently enough. Successful lawyer Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas) has a torrid weekend affair with aggressive book edi-

tor Alex Forrester (Glenn Close). But since he is also a happy family man, Gallagher doesn't want

his brief fling to go beyond that weekend. Alex Forrest, however, has different ideas. She hounds the unreceptive lawyer, phoning him at his home and meeting him repeatedly at his office. When he doesn't respond to her, the unstable woman retaliates with increasing violence, endangering Gallagher's family, and forcing him to confront her in the film's bloody conclusion.

But Fatal Attraction is really about taking responsibility for one's actions. In an age of AIDS and a related shift in moral values, Dan Gallagher's brief affair is slightly foolish, especially considering the beautiful wife and adorable daughter he has at home. Yet his response to the sultry Alex seems an understandable human error in the hands of screenwriter James Dearden, who gives his characters flaws and paints their day-to-day life as ordinary, even boring.

In other words, just like real life.

Dearden's script is slow-paced but relentless. Violence erupts,

but only after all the logical alternatives have been exhausted by the characters and the suspense has built to a peak. The message is clear: Violence,

fascination with wild exteriors and smoky, surreal camera work

even murder, is not beyond anyone's realm, whether you live in a high-rise apartment in New York or a Victorian bungalow in the suburbs.

Unfortunately, director Adrian Lyne doesn't allow his film to sustain such a realistic mood and setting. As he demonstrated in 9 1/2 Weeks, Lyne has a fascination with wild exteriors and smoky, surreal camera work. While this may have worked in

the dreamy 9 1/2 Weeks, in Fatal Attraction it's just annoying fluff, which lifts the film from a level of familiarity, where it belongs, into an unreal world.

Add to this a repeat of 9 1/2 Weeks' heavy-handed sexual symbolism, and a lot of Fatal Attraction's power is lost.

Fortunately, Lyne has cast two fine actors in the lead roles of Gallagher and Forrest. Michael Douglas, abandoning his recent swashbuckling image, is believable as the conservative lawyer who sees his life falling apart. It's an understated performance, with Douglas giving his best moments simply in reacting to the ring of a phone.

Close is also perfectly suited to the role of Alex Forrest. Her likeable screen image makes her descent into madness more disturbing and, in many ways, understandable. When the two finally meet in the end, it's hard to know who to cheer for.

But it is at that last moment, in the bathroom at Gallagher's new suburban home, that the film falls apart. Unwilling to let

his movie stand on its own merits, screenwriter Dearden and director Lyne commit a film cliché of asinine proportions. It's a cheap fright, tailor-made to scare the audience, but only because they would never expect such ridiculousness. It's a brief moment, but when it occurs it is so annoying it forces a reexamination of the rest of the film.

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Fortunately, the movie's suspenseful script and fine acting offset this minor miscalculation, making Fatal Attraction a flawed but terrifyingly entertaining way to waste a couple of hours.

Violence, even murder, is not beyond anyone's realm

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