

Nymphs, killers and sun-gods in review

By Richard Lim

Amid all the hype over blockbusters-in-waiting such as *Stargate*, *Interview with a Vampire* and *Frankenstein*, a subtle murder mystery quietly creeps into town, offering an impressive cast (Richard Dreyfus, Linda Hamilton, John Lithgow, J.T. Walsh) and director Bruce Beresford (*Driving Miss Daisy*). There are no special effects, gouts of blood or hails of bullets, but by employing those old-fashioned tricks of intelligence, subtlety and a sense of ominous inevitability, *Silent Fall* proves itself an effective thriller.

Silent Fall
Park Lane
Empire Dartmouth

Richard Dreyfus is a retired child psychiatrist called back into service by a brutal double murder, which we (refreshingly) never see. The children of the victims, an ingenious nymph-like daughter and her autistic younger brother, hold the key to the crime in their minds. Dreyfus' doctor must find his way into the boy's memory to unravel the events which unfolded, egged on by his unhappy wife (Hamilton) and a pompous colleague (Lithgow) at the local psychiatric hospital.

Of special note is Liv Tyler, the actress who plays the coy, cunning daughter. Better known as the girl in the new Aerosmith videos, and as the daughter of Steve Tyler, the band's lead singer, Liv Tyler shows a range and capacity which would embarrass other models who call themselves actresses.

The film is very much a Bruce Beresford film, drawing careful lines around each character's actions and motivations. Even the apparently exploitative scene where the 18-year old daughter, wearing only a night-shirt, encounters the psychiatrist, is of importance to the plot and both characters' personalities.

Silent Fall is an interesting movie, alternately intriguing and frightening. If you're the last in line for one of those action-packed hits, don't despair. *Silent Fall* is a suitable alternative, but catch it before it's gone.

by Kevin Halfpenny

If you were to look up the term "yuppie scum" in a dictionary, you'd probably find a picture of James Spader next to it.

Movie Review
StarGate
Park Lane Cinema

Having made a name for himself playing despicable slimeballs in everything from *Sex, Lies and Videotape* to last summer's *Wolf*, the slender, dirty-blond Spader has received the unenviable typecast in Hollywood as being "the" villain.

He's the guy audiences love to hate. Tom Hanks must have nightmares about him.

Lately, however, something strange has happened to our reliably evil Mr. Spader. The trademark pitchfork and pointy red horns we've associated with him for the past ten years have gradually been replaced by something a little more mainstream and audience-friendly — puffy, white wings and a halo.

In his more recent films such as *The Music of Chance* and *Dream Lover*, we've been introduced to a new side of James the Terrible — one which reveals a hidden vulnerability we never before knew existed.

No longer, it appears, are audiences repulsed by the sight of his arrogantly over-confident five-foot, ten-inch frame or the nails-on-chalkboard sound of his "I am God and you are shit" voice. Instead they are connecting with him emotionally onscreen and rooting for him.

In *StarGate*, Spader must travel back in time (and space) through the StarGate, a mysterious other-worldly portal, to a strange and alien world in hopes of unravelling the origins of civilization. With the help of an embittered ex-soldier (Kurt Russell) and a rag-tag team of U.S. military personnel, Daniel must do battle with the planet's tyrannical ruler, the all-powerful Egyptian sun-god, Ra (played by the eerily androgynous Jaye Davidson) who holds the key to the StarGate as well as a big nuclear bomb which he plans to fax back to present-day earth via the gate.

It's up to the small band of freedom fighters to foil the god's destructive plans and return home safely with the answers to life's great mysteries.

Spader, appearing in his first starring role in a major studio release, embodies Daniel with a tender, child-like innocence. With his long blonde locks and round-rimmed specs, Spader's Daniel is at once a hilarious, sweet-natured geek and a brilliant, confident teacher.

His performance is smart and touching — in a genre of film where smart and touching performances are few and far between.

Then there's Kurt Russell, who himself has been guilty of playing the dark, secretive "man with a past" character more than once in his career (remember *Tombstone*?). Nothing new for him here, I'm afraid.

Burdened with the tragic, accidental death of his young son, Russell's character literally walks through most of *StarGate* with a disgusted, annoying scowl on his face, blowing away baddies when called upon.

Despite some slow-moving scenes in the middle of the film, there are some truly spectacular, eye-popping special effects sequences in *StarGate*. When the men finally do step through the StarGate itself, you can almost feel your seat hurtle at break-neck speeds through a roller coaster of constellations and light years. It's as if you were playing one of those interactive video driving games where the vehicle actually moves. It's an incredible rush.

All in all, *StarGate* is an intelligent and fascinating science-fiction fantasy loaded with breathtaking visuals and colourful characters.

The film is carried by the enjoyably subtle performance of James Spader.

With time running out on the veteran actor to prove himself as a major leading man in Hollywood, James Spader now stands at the threshold of his own StarGate hoping that what awaits him on the other side is the success which has eluded him for so long.



by Mark Farmer

There's good camp and bad camp, but as long as it's funny camp it gets my seal of approval. *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (whoa, better abbreviate that) is hilarious camp, a subtle lesson on homophobia and a slew of saucy one-liners delivered in twangy Australian accents, e.g. "Why don't you light your tampon and blow your box apart, because it's the only bang you're going to get." Yowza! Try that the next time you're scrambling for a witty comeback.

Priscilla Queen of the Desert
Stephan Elliott
Wormwood's

But God knows even the best one-liners won't carry a film, and if you don't believe me go rent *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*. Luckily *Priscilla* has got a strong enough plot to glue the laughs together, namely a transvestite lounge act touring Australia in a pink bus, licooured to the hilt and ready for trouble. Mitzi, Felicia and Bernadette leave Sydney for the outback, get lost in the desert and get rescued by an aborigine whom they garb in silver lamé and temporarily recruit into their act.

We meet an old codger who remembers the glory days of transvestite lounge acts (!!) and his amiable wife, who has the unique ability to shoot ping-pong balls out her snatch (maybe that's not unique — I wouldn't know).

Then comes the grand finale at their destination hotel, where Mitzi fulfils his dream to climb a well-known mountain in drag. He also reveals his deepest, darkest secret: the two people waiting for him at the hotel, the people he didn't dare tell anyone about...

Priscilla is charming and wicked, as a cross-country transvestite odyssey should be. A lot of the jokes I can't tell you about because they're visual: dream sequences and 10-foot-high silver-sequined shoes, that sort of thing.

Note that this isn't a film about homophobia, although it touches on it. It's a road movie, a fashion statement and a clash of cultures. Very entertaining, but don't even think of going without an open mind, sister.

A-
The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert is at Wormwood's Dog & Monkey Cinema on Gottingen St., Nov 4 - 10. Nov 5 is a special screening: come in drag and get in for a buck. Cash bar.

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