



the movies

Louise Snider

Arrogant gigolo lacks loyalty, gives a freebie

Paul Schrader, the writer-director who exploded onto the screen with firestorms like "Taxi Driver" and "Blue Collar," has been running through a consignment of duds ever since. These include "Hardcore" and his most recent film, "American Gigolo" (R).

The legacy of Schrader's Dutch Reformation Church (Grand Rapids) upbringing, with its strict moral code and burden of sin and guilt, created an electric current of tension in the earlier films that has fizzled into a mild tingle of voyeurism in "American Gigolo."

Richard Gere is the protagonist, Julian Kay, a luxury-loving stud who turns tricks for a callgirl-cabboy ring run by Nina Van Pallandt. Ostensibly, he works as a translator and chauffeur, so he can acquire wealthy women visitors around Beverly Hills with an initial bow to propriety.

To help out a friend, he also will occasionally do "fags and kinky sex." And wouldn't you know it? It's one of these admirable good deeds for a friend that becomes his downfall. A woman is murdered with whom he once had sexual relations as requested by her sadomasochistic husband.

WHEN A DETECTIVE, significantly named Sunday, informs Julian he is a suspect in the murder, it appears that the long arm of the law and the Lord are reaching out to catch the sinner, even if it's for the wrong crime.

At this point, there are hints that the film might develop into a taut, if seamy, mystery. No such luck. This is not a "who done it" but a moral mishmash "who should pay for it."

Julian has stepped on too many toes. He's become arrogant. Instead of loyalty to the folks who gave him his start, he wants to freelance on his own. To make matters worse, he has an unprofessional affair with the wife (Lauren Hutton) of a senator, and the senator isn't overjoyed.

Hutton's character looks very classy and chic, but she shows us her down-to-earth honesty by telling Julian she wants to — Julian, a person of sensitivity, can only shake his head at such uncouth language.

He shakes his head a lot. The collapse of his world is a puzzle to him. As he sees it, he's only trying to bring pleasure to people. So why are they all down on him?

IMAGINE HIS distress at the thought of jail — a life without shopping at Sotbeby, Parke Bernet, driving a Mercedes 450 SL, or dining at Ma Maison. Gere captures the character's inner turmoil as he rages from close-mouthed confidence to silent concern.

In the end, it seems that even the director abandons him, as we sit through one fadeout after another before Schrader can decide on a conclusion.

Ah for the clarity of an old film like "The Postman Always Rings Twice." Lana Turner and John Garfield scorched the screen in a film that was very sensual without any nudity. ("American Gigolo" has nudity but lacks sensuality.) They killed her husband. They were guilty as hell. That's just where they were going, and everyone knew it.



Fatso's hang-up

Dom DeLuise stars in the title role of "Fatso," as a 40-ish Italian bachelor whose hang-up is food. The film marks actress Anne Bancroft's debut as writer-director; she also co-stars in the comedy. (Below) Ms. Bancroft as Antoinette and DeLuise as Dominic share a snack. The 20th Century-Fox release opened Friday in metropolitan Detroit.



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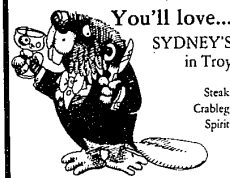
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