



Albert Finney and Diane Keaton star as George and Faith Dunlap, a newly separated husband and wife, who have four daughters, in "Shoot the Moon."



the movies

Louise Snider

'Shoot the Moon' misses its mark despite expertise

"Shoot the Moon" (R) is a movie with impressive credentials because of its cast, Diane Keaton and Albert Finney, its director, Alan Parker (who directed "Fame" and "Midnight Express"); and its screenwriter, Bo Goldman (who scripted "Melvin and Howard" and "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest").

The result, however, is much less than you would expect. In fact, the irony of this movie is that in spite of the important names associated with it, its greatest assets are four generally unknown children who give it what merit it has.

I get the impression that the idea was to make a serious, adult film about the break-up of a marriage. There wouldn't be any phony, cutesy stuff to win over an audience. The principal characters wouldn't be nasty, but they wouldn't be especially lovable either. That was the idea. It didn't work.

For one thing, the attempt at an honest, mature approach floundered. It was derailed by two sequences: an episode in a restaurant which was introduced for comic relief and which looks exactly like what it is — contrived — and an equally contrived and very melodramatic ending.

SECOND, ALTHOUGH the intent may have been to explore the relations of a splintered family, we have not been given enough information about the characters and their backgrounds to make their behavior and their dilemma of consequence to us.

The most anxious moments in the history of this 15-year marriage have come in the struggle to dissolve it — and it is a struggle. The bonds of matrimony have been severely frayed, but not severed.

Albert Finney as George, the husband, clearly conveys his mixed emotions. He has walked out on his wife, Faith (Diane Keaton), and taken up with another woman (Karen Allen), yet he is not ready to give up his marriage. He still thinks in proprietary terms of his wife, his house, his children.

We can understand his feelings. We just can't understand why the marriage deteriorated. He talks about his wife being "too perfect." That really doesn't clarify things for us.

Goldman's script conveys the anger and the pain of what is happening but not the reason. There is no cause and effect in this movie, only effect.

GEORGE SUFFERS emotional turmoil because he can't make a clean break. Faith is much more accepting of the situation, much more pliant, and also much more of a blank than George. She has a moment of anguish after their separation when she sits in the bathtub and sings an old Beatles song.

Then she has an affair with the first man to come along. That's Frank (Peter Weller), a bulldozer operator. She says he reminds her of what George was like 15 years ago — a statement that makes these people all the more puzzling.

How does the non-intellectual Frank remind her of George, the intellectual novelist? Is she referring to sexual prowess, or what? We never do find out.

The person with some values in this movie and some spunk is the oldest daughter, Sherry. She sees clearly what the adults are up to and she isn't reluctant about telling them.

Dana Hill, the young actress who plays Sherry, does a superb job and the other youngsters playing her three younger sisters also are very effective in their roles and very delightful as an ensemble.

Now, if only the rest of the movie were up to the level of the children's performances.

what's at the movies

ABSENCE OF MALICE (PG). Sally Field stars as a reporter who libels a labor leader (Paul Newman) in a murder case. Film written by former Detroit Free Press editor Kurt Luedtke.

THE AMATEUR (R). Computer analyst with CIA sets out to avenge the death of his girlfriend by terrorists. John Savage, Marthe Keller and Christopher Plummer star.

ARTHUR (PG). Dudley Moore is a playboy millionaire in love with Liza Minnelli in this contemporary comedy.

ATLANTIC CITY (R). Louis Malle's wonderfully vibrant, superbly acted, romantic film about old and young dreamers in Atlantic City.

BEAU PÈRE (R). A sexy, sophisticated comedy from Bertrand Blier, Oscar-winning director of "Get Out Your Handkerchiefs." Patrick Dewaere stars as the stepfather, and Ariel Besse is his 14-year-old stepdaughter and the problem is she's madly in love with him.

THE BORDER (R). Jack Nicholson portrays a border-patrol guard driven to violence by a nitwit wife, a corrupt colleague and a frustrating job.

G General audiences admitted.

PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.

R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.

X No one under 18 admitted.

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