



Mariel Hemingway is Dorothy Stratten, the clerk from Vancouver who becomes a Playboy Bunny, then Playmate of the Year, an aspiring actress and a murder victim.

table talk

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the movies
Dan Greenberg
'Star 80'
Sleazy character
steals the show

Human beings seem to enjoy forbidden pleasures. Of course if they're not available, pecking in on others is always fun. Playboy magazine, a slick, well-packaged view of other people living without restraint, has capitalized on this element of human nature. Additionally, it provides a lot of material for sexual fantasies.

"Star 80" also fits that description. It is a slick, well-packaged film about the Playboy world at its glibly best and sordid worst.

Although unofficially billed as the "Dorothy Stratten Story," "Star 80" is a character study of a small-time pimp, Paul Snider (Eric Roberts). "Sleaze 80" might have been a better title except the film is so well done that we almost lose sight of the fact that it is about a creep.

Snider is a cheap hustler who discovers and merchandises a sweet but sexy young thing, Dorothy Stratten (Mariel Hemingway), whom he found working in a Vancouver, British Columbia, fast-food outlet.

SNIDER MANAGES her career to the pinnacle of success. Playboy "Playmate of the Year" which, in turn, leads to film offers.

All that info, and more, is presented via docudrama-style interviews with Dorothy's mother (Carroll Baker), a photographer (Keith Hefner), a private detective (Josh Mostel), Dorothy herself, and others. Apparently the film follows quite carefully the unfortunate details of the real Stratten's brief career and grisly demise, except perhaps for the implication that she had considerable acting potential.

Bob Fosse ("Sweet Charity," "Cabaret," "Lenny" and "All That Jazz") wrote and directed "Star 80" with the same intensity that characterized his earlier films, but his usual high-powered pace falters from time-to-time, leaving the audience bored and slightly confused. It never was clear why a couple of hours were hanging Paul out the window of a high-rise.

Gradually, the film emerges less as a portrait of Stratten and her Playmate career and more as a picture of husband Snider, a truly second-rate, small-time hustler. Roberts' intensity of movement, pronunciation and acting style effectively portray this sad, crummy little character.

Hemingway's depiction of the tragic Stratten is excellent. Her ability to transcend femininity from the shy, insecure, innocent waitress to the pretentious, sophisticated Playmate-on-tour is compelling.

Hemingway's acting, her slick showgirl make-up and high-fashion clothes complete the picture that world-renowned cinematographer Sven Nykvist has photographed so well.

HEMINGWAY EVEN had her bosom done for this role, the silicone implants qualifying her for Playmate status. It is not clear whether those implants are considered costing or make-up.

With such devotion to art, how can the film fail?

I suspect that this well-done sleaze will be a box-office winner. But it is sad to see such film craft and expertise used to portray unattracted, unworthy hustlers.

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Giff Robertson (left) is Playboy empire's Hugh Hefner. Eric Roberts is Paul Snider, the small-time hustler who dominates the life and death of Dorothy Stratten.

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