

Barker brings little magic to 'Lord of Illusions'

TICKETS
PLEASE



JOHN
MONAGHAN

You'd think we'd catch on by now. Whenever a movie character walks alone in a creepy place, the music stops and the action slows. Suddenly, from outside of the frame, a mysterious figure appears out of nowhere and the audience jumps a collective mile.

Such moments happen a good five times in Clive Barker's "Lord of Illusions," which plays not so much like a well-staged magic show as a ride through a creaky carnival spook house. The tricks couldn't be cheaper, but often we're scared just the same.

Scott Bakula, late of TV's "Quantum Leap," plays Harry Demore, a private detective attracted to "the dark side." He has just finished the exorcism of a young boy and now gets mixed up with a cult case involving the world's foremost magicians.

Swann (Kevin O'Connor) sells out glitzy, David Copperfield-style magic spectacles — the kind where scantily-clad dancers circle Bakula sets. He was once the student of Nix (Daniel Van Buren), whose authentic powers allowed him to levitate, juggle fire, and plant realistic illusions

REVIEW

In the heads of both disciples and nonbelievers.

Nix is dead, buried deep, but Swann has good reason to believe that he is ready to stage a comeback. As the friends who helped kill Nix begin to die themselves, Swann must devise a way to protect himself and his wife from what could be the devil.

The remaining cult members sense his coming. Wiping their mouths from a meal of raw animal flesh, the believers tear out their hair, kneel on broken glass, and prepare for the coming of their savior.

You get the sense that Clive Barker is one sick puppy who enjoys coming up with this stuff far more than we do watching it. Movies like this should be fun, but the laughs in "Lord of Illusions" are mostly unintentional since Barker and company are so seriously intent on disturbing us.

Bakula tries hard as the ghost-busting gunshoe, but he doesn't seem tough enough or romantic enough to kick down doors or woo Swann's wife. O'Connor's Swann fares better. Reluctant to use power, he possesses, like Swann, a round in a daze, like he's seen things that no man ever should.

Some of the best horror movies ("Night of the Living Dead,"

"Texas Chainsaw Massacre") can approach something almost mystical in their low-budget minimalism. Barker's medium-size budget only makes his movie look cheap, with much of the money spent on C-grade computer imaging.

The latter happens in one of the movie's few clever scenes, where one of Swann's illusions goes horribly wrong. We watch from the magician's point of view as heavy swords fall from the ceiling as he tries in vain to free himself from the rotating table he's strapped to.

The magic angle is a good one, though Barker fails to even hint at what lies behind the display cases of a magician's repertory where all the secrets are stored. In "Lord of Illusions," the popular writer/director barely gives us the illusion that he knows any more about magic than we do.

To leave a message for John Monaghan, dial 953-5947, mail-box number 1866, on a touch-tone phone, fax him a note at 591-7279, or write him in care of Entertainment, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.



UNITED ARTISTS PICTURES INC.

Thriller: Scott Bakula, Joel Smetow and Famke Janssen star in United Artists' supernatural film noir thriller "Lord of Illusions."

'Watch It' offers sharp views of men, women, relationships

BY LEANNE ROGERS
STAFF WRITER

A group of guys sharing a house, spending their time partying and playing elaborate practical jokes on each other. Sounds like a frat house but in the enjoyable 1993 film "Watch It" the guys are all in their mid-thirties and a bit old for their lifestyle.

The title of the film comes from the game of practical jokes that started when several of the men knew each other in college. Nothing is out of bounds. The only rule to the game is that you can't get mad, you can only get even.

The owner of the house is Michael, played by Jon Tenney, a handsome but smarmy womanizer. A new addition to the household is his cousin John, played by Peter Gallagher, a guy who can't seem to settle in a career or even in one place for very long.

Things become a bit tense when John falls in love with his cousin's former girlfriend. With Michael's lack of maturity and some childhood grudges against



Peter Gallagher

John, he naturally can't resist trying to get back together with his ex-girlfriend, played by Suzy Amis. But then John doesn't help his situation by getting scared and being non-committal. A younger friend of the woman, who points out her consistently bad choices in men, accurately refers

VIDEO

to the cousins as the Womanizer and the Non-Committer.

There are some pretty hilarious exchanges in the film about men, women, relationships and how to avoid them. One of the roommates — there is one in everyone circle of friends — waxes philosophically about why younger women are so attracted to guys who are jerks. Since he readily puts himself in that category, he describes himself as "human cocaine."

For all the humor, "Watch It" also makes some sharp observations about its characters and the way they approach life. Even at their worst behavior, the men still have some genuine emotion and pathos. Sometimes they just can't help but be immature jerks.

All of the performances are very good including John McGinnis as the philosophical roommate pan-stricken when he falls in love and Lilli Taylor as a young woman wiser than her older and better educated friend.

BEWARE

Centuries ago a second coming was foretold. But what's coming is more terrifying than anyone expects.

CHRISTOPHER WALKEN
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Quirky 'Younger and Younger' lacks depth, whimsy and heart

BY LEANNE ROGERS
STAFF WRITER

Jonathan Younger has a pretty cushy life — sleeping late, getting his newspaper and going out to breakfast, taking long naps and going out dancing. Unfortunately for his harried wife Penelope, that lifestyle leaves her doing all the work hunched over her desk at their storage business.

An inveterate womanizer, Jonathan thinks his life will be even easier after his wife dies of a heart attack. But Jonathan is in for a couple shocks — his wife keeps appearing to him and his business is soon headed down the tubes because he hasn't a clue about running the business.

That's the basic scene for the 1995 film "Younger and Younger" — the title referring to the name of the business and to the appearance of Penelope, who looks younger each time she turns up.

Donald Sutherland and Lolita Davidovich, the latter hardly recognizable under heavy makeup early in the film, play the couple who may or may not have actually liked each other when they married some years earlier. Or maybe Jonathan, a transplanted Londoner, married Penelope to get into her family's storage business.

I like a film about unusual or eccentric people as well as the next guy but there needs to be more depth and feeling to make it work. Unfortunately "Younger and Younger" lacks any real feeling. Writer/director Percy Adlon shows any possibility for genu-

VIDEO

ine emotion. When Penelope dies, Adlon has her death throes spinning like a dervish and convulsing in her wheeled office chair. It isn't funny or sad as the woman's death should be, it's just ridiculous.

The film is full of capable actors like Sutherland and Davidovich, along with Brendan Fraser as their son, Linda Hunt as one of their storage unit tenants and Sally Kellerman as a woman charged with murdering her husband. Unfortunately their efforts are pretty much wasted.

Jonathan eventually starts to feel bad about his wife's death but only after she starts looking young and curvaceous. He has treated her so shabbily when she was alive that it's kind of hard to understand why she still is interested in him or to care about how

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he feels. And I don't really need to have a lengthy musical interlude sung by Sutherland, who isn't famous for his singing voice.

Adlon's other films like "Sugarbaby" and "Bagdad Cafe" had quirkiness but also whimsy and heart which "Younger and Younger" totally lacks. Watching this film makes it easy to understand why it ended up on video with little or no theatrical release.



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