

MOVIES

'English Patient' might be year's best

TICKETS PLEASE



JOHN MONAGHAN

In the wrong hands, "The English Patient" could have easily turned into some schmaltzy tearjerker.

Imagine Tom Cruise buying the rights to Michael Ondaatje's prize-winning novel, stripping all its complexity and focusing on what is at the core a pretty rou-

time story of illicit love, regret, and betrayal around the Second World War.

Fortunately, "The English Patient" that's already topping critics' best-of-year lists is handled with such profound beauty and intelligence that it's difficult to imagine anyone doing it better.

It opens with dark, delicate brush strokes that dissolve into the shadowy, wind-swept sands of the desert. The camera heads higher, just above the cockpit of a single prop plane. Shells and machine gunfire stripe through

it and, as the screen fades to white, the plane bursts into flames.

The surviving pilot (Ralph Fiennes), burned beyond recognition and barely able to breathe, ends up in an Allied army hospital, known only as "The English Patient" because his memory is supposedly lost. Years later, in the ruins of an Italian monastery, a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) pieces together his tragic story.

Fiennes, so impressive in "Schindler's List" and "Quiz Show," plays the pilot, Count

Almásy, shown in flashback as a linguist and explorer in the late 1930s whose maps of the Egyptian desert prove a hot commodity when war finally breaks out. He meets Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas), a married woman who helps fund the expedition, and soon they are in a passionate romance.

Picture this, Harlequin fans: Alone together in his room. The red ball of the Egyptian sunset sinks behind ancient Cairo temples, casting a pink glow of passion over the lovers. They plunge into an all-consuming embrace as he tears the dress from her chest, sinks to his knees and begins to feast on her expectant flesh.

Normally I'd cringe at a love scene like this, but writer-director Anthony Minghella ("Truly Madly Deeply") handles the whole affair with such bloody good taste that it's impossible to knock it.

The movie nimbly jumps between this romance and the unique bond Almásy forms with his nurse, a woman who has lost

virtually everyone close to her. She begins to fall in love with a young Sikh bomb expert (Naveen Andrews) who has learned to overlook in individuals his strong hatred of oppressive English imperialism.

Almásy's memory is further forced when another Canadian (Willem Dafoe), his hands covered mysteriously by gloves, enters the picture. His own painful story is yet another emotionally draining scene in a movie that is liable to stir even the most detached filmgoer.

Aside from delivering such an emotional wallop, "The English Patient" is full of unique moments and amazing sequences. The nurse and her temple at night and through a series of ropes and pulleys, she's able to view the breathtaking frescoes face to face.

Should you like to look deeper, you'll find "The English Patient" rich in unifying symbols. The sun, water, fire, even the copy of Herodotus that the man carries turn up again and again to link

the characters. A second viewing is a must to understand how it all strings together.

If the movie falters anywhere, it's when these symbols get in the way of creating three-dimensional characters. Almásy is more or less defined as a deep person by his sole possession: a book of philosophy crammed with scraps of paper. You don't know that much about him as an actual person, before or after his injuries.

But since when has it been a sin to make an audience work for its pleasures? On so many levels "The English Patient" is a rich, satisfying movie experience that will likely be awarded the gold statuette at Oscar time. And for once it just might deserve it.

John Monaghan welcomes your calls and comments. You can listen to him on Dave Dixon's Radio Show AM 1270, 8 p.m. to midnight Saturdays. To leave John a voice mail message, dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1866.

GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

AMC Theatres	General Cinema	United Artists	United Artists	United Artists
<p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p>	<p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p>	<p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p>	<p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p>	<p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p> <p>Argentinean (PG-13) 11:00 A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war. A beautiful story of love and war.</p>



Drama:
Ralph
Fiennes
and Kristin
Scott
Thomas
star in
Anthony
Minghella's
"The
English
Patient."



Have your first cup of coffee this Saturday morning with "Our House," Detroit Edison's Home Energy Conservation Show. Let Tom Tynan and Paula Engel get your mind percolating this Saturday at 6:30 a.m. Find out ways to make your home more energy efficient, saving you money and helping to preserve the environment at the same time. Sit down with "Our House" this Saturday at 6:30 a.m. on WDIV-TV, Channel 4.

Turning energy into solutions.

Detroit Edison

Observer & Eccentric

NEWSPAPERS

WVIC 10.3

Detroit's Nicest Rock

Our House

Now showing