



the movies

Dan Greenberg

Surviving tyranny is hidden message in 'Spider Woman'

Good movies are entertaining, stimulating, thoughtful and thought-provoking. They require intelligence, talent and creativity. "The Kiss of the Spider Woman" adds humor and sensitivity to those characteristics and is one of the better movies you'll ever see.

The entire production is pleasantly misleading from the very start. The Spider Woman is not some plastic Japanese monster who kisses her victims to death. Rather, the film is by turns a touching, amusing, frightening story of two men surviving inhuman imprisonment in a totalitarian regime.

Luis Molina (William Hurt) has been sentenced to an eight-year prison term for sexually corrupting a young boy. He survives, psychologically, by "telling" movies to his cellmate, Valentín Arriglea (Raul Julia), a political prisoner who lives on anger at the repressive regime and on belief in the moral rightness of the resistance.

Ultimately, however, under torture, Valentín takes refuge in his memories of an upper-class girl, Marta (Sonia Braga), with whom he had an affair. He, too, survives in the dream world of illusions as irrelevant as Luis' movies to which Valentín objects.

"THE KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN" is set in South America, presenting a clear but simple statement about repressive dictatorships south of the border and the terrible methods used to achieve their ends.

But the film is not about Argentina or Chile or any other South American country any more than it is about a homosexual and a political activist. "The Kiss of the Spider Woman" is about tyranny and repression everywhere and the great courage some have to survive the worst tortures men can inflict. Those survivors become great symbols of human courage at its best because they value the humanity of their brethren while maintaining their own dignity.

Luis has reached a terrible crossroad. He wants to love and be loved, but he is imprisoned for homosexuality. The prison warden promises him freedom, to care for his ill mother, in return for gaining Valentín's confidence and, of course, underground secrets.

Luis overcomes Valentín's initial hostility and anger. Gradually they become such good comrades that Valentín requests that Luis continue "telling" his movie. It is a stupid Nazi propaganda film, vastly and humorously overplayed, but, in Luis' words, "so romantic."

Sonia Braga stars in that movie, as well as taking the title role in another film Luis tells, "The Kiss of the Spider Woman." Her versatility in three diverse but essentially sappy "B" movie roles complements the broad range of emotion William Hurt projects. Raul Julia, as well, displays tremendous passion in his anger, fear, frustration and humanity. The entire cast, in fact, is a great credit to the production.

BY FAR, Hurt excels as the tortured homosexual who cannot find peace. The sensitivity of his portrayal and his range of acting skills prevent the film from degenerating into mawkish sentimentality. Hurt avoids the embarrassed posturing so often pictured as homosexual behavior, while acting like a man who prefers feminine characteristics. He is sentimental in the best sense of the term but never maudlin. He never simpers, he just suffers and we do so with him.

The other remarkable feature of "Spider Woman" is the sophisticated way in which the film deals with reality and illusion; an age-old question, what is real? The film constantly and delicately threads its way in and out of the film stories Luis "tells." In these "B" movie characters and characterizations he finds salvation for they are "so romantic" and his surroundings are anything but.

A good deal of the smooth transition from reality to illusion and back develops as Valentín gradually accepts Luis' sensitivity and realizes that the silly film stories are not for pleasure alone. Their illusory setting is the only safe place in a tortured world.

Although ultimately grim and pessimistic in its conclusions about our world, "The Kiss of the Spider Woman" celebrates man's courage and humanity in such a sensitive way that you will leave the theater with a heightened sense of human worth.



Strange creatures

Classic scary themes are dealt with in "Fright Night" (above), where Roddy McDowall is a moviemaker who discovers there really are vampires, and "The Bride," co-starring Biting and Jennifer Beals as Dr. Frankenstein and his beautiful creation, Eva. Both films are playing at Detroit-area theaters.



Caymus Vineyards is noteworthy



wine
Richard Watson

When histories of the California wine industry are written, they usually focus heavily on two important intervals. First is the 1850-1870 period when names like Charles Krug, Beringer, Hararthy, Schramm and Niebaum stand out as pioneers in creating a new industry.

Following the initial pair of decades, then punctuated by the phylloxera louse toward the end of the century and Prohibition sometime later, the next important time interval begins in the late 1950s when the industry as we know it today had its beginnings. The period is populated with names like Robert Mondavi, Sebastiani, Joe Heitz, Mayacamas, Joseph Swan, Fetzer, Ridge and Chalose — the list is a long one.

Between these two intervals there was a few other important names in history, of course: Martini, Beaulieu, Parducci, Wente and perhaps Story Hill. But there really are not very many when the extended time interval is taken into consideration. (Consider how many names there are that helped shape the California industry, while here in Michigan only Bronco Nerd of the Zug Island Winery stands out as the sole leader.)

In the recent era there is yet another name of high merit that rarely appears, yet should. That is Charles Wagner, curmudgeon of Caymus Vineyards, in central Napa. He is the product of a farming family long in the Rutherford area that has grown a variety of crops on its land, most recently grapes.

HE CAN READILY recall the time when most of his wine was sold in bulk or blended with others for mass distribution, when winemaking was a losing proposition. He and his family endured those days, only to finally reap the benefits due them when wine became the national obsession it did in the early 1970s.

His first releases under his own label were in 1972 when a reeling (discontinued after 1973) Cabernet and pinot noir were issued. The early prices were low, the wines excellent. Only a few short years later, with critics and public applauding his efforts highly, the prices went up, dramatically on some.

"People pay what I ask" is Wagner's response. Today his Special Selection wines, usually pinot Noir and cabernet, can command \$40 a bottle and sell out quickly. His standard issues are priced in the middle of the Napa range, and he seems never to make a wine that is less than excellent.

It is the pinot noir grape that is Caymus' finest, one that has regularly defeated many a winemaker. But Wagner has the skill to handle it well, turn it into the complex, soft, velvety wine that it can be at its best. These wines sing with the joy of greatness. If you can find any locally buy it, see what a California "burgundy" can be.

Caymus was also in the early movement that made a bluish wine from a red grape. As early as 1973 Wagner was marketing a pinot noir blanc, the name changing to Ocell de Pedrix in 1976 ("Eye of the Partridge"), reflecting its delicate, salmon coloring.

ALL OF THIS extensive introduction is to announce that Caymus wines are now generally available in Michigan. True, they have been here before but were then represented by a less dependable distributor. They will now arrive in decent quantities and can be found at most premium wine stores.

We now have the 1984 Ocell de Pedrix, a 1981

zinfandel, a truly marvelous 1983 chardonnay (full of rich, buttery goodness), a 1983 sauvignon blanc and, soon, the 1981 pinot noir. Not to be missed, any of them.

You may want to think twice about buying the 1983 Special Selection Cabernet, the one that carries the \$40 price tag. Wagner is sure, however, that if you don't buy it someone soon will. And there are only five cases of it in the state.

TWO RATHER interesting news items have come my way recently. The Napa Valley Vintners Association has instituted a hotline to report all about the developing 1985 harvest. Individual winemakers and growers will discuss the weather, fruit condition and more in two-minute taped messages, updated weekly. This service will continue through Nov. 7. Call 1-800-532-7874.

The Tabor Hill winery of Berrien County has just purchased the old Bronco Champagne and Wine Co. in Hartford, Mich. The acquisition will greatly expand Tabor Hill's present facilities, including sparkling wine production. This move also will add one more tasting facility to its present three. The Bronco name is gone forever but we may see a strengthened Tabor Hill as a result. A good exchange!

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