

Confusing story leaves 'Eye' sightless

By Samuel McKewon
Senior editor

Obsession is not an easy thing to put on film. Alfred Hitchcock knew how to do it; his films had an obsession rising out of normality. These made the best films, and his main actor was the everyman James Stewart.

But obsession is not supposed to be confusing — we can't be left wondering who was obsessed and, more important, why.

So watching the new movie "Eye of the Beholder" was an alienating experience, in which the viewer is entirely separated from the events onscreen. It was the kind of separation that gives you a headache.

The movie is based on a 1980 novel by Marc Behm with an interesting premise: a surveillance photographer

for the British Embassy (Ewan McGregor) strays from the rules when he gets too close to a cold-blooded serial killer (Ashley Judd) for reasons we can only try to grasp.

The most logical explanation is that McGregor's character (who has no name, just "The Eye") views his prey, Joanna Eris, as a lot like his daughter. He is no longer able to see his daughter because his ex-wife walked out on him. The Eye envisions his young daughter everywhere he goes, until, in a strange scene, he leaves her to follow the killer.

As for Judd, her character essentially stalks rich men, kills them, then steals their wad of cash — or whatever they might have on them.

Judd makes a good vamp — sunglasses and wigs look about as good on her as anyone — but her role is woefully

underwritten. There is only a slight hint of Judd's motivation as to why she is who she is — but even that doesn't stick. It would have been better if there hadn't been any motivation at all.

So Judd travels from big city to big city (San Francisco, Chicago and New York to name a few) and the Eye follows, taking pictures along the way and becoming her guardian angel of sorts.

For a while, the movie works. But there's too much strangeness, both in the script and production, for the movie to work.

Director Stephan Elliot pours on the style needlessly; the film moves out of the noir genre and into some kind of psychological thriller. It steals from Hitchcock's "Rear Window" and "Vertigo," but leaves behind Hitchcock's ability to establish a scene. And the performances are off.

McGregor is plays a character who was much older in the novel; his acting suffers for it. We strain to figure what his character really wants from Joanna — lust, love or just the chance to watch another murder.

Judd's character has no drive, but she manages to make it work, for a while. Anything is better than her junk role in "Double Jeopardy."

The supporting cast is small; k.d. lang is The Eye's single connection to the outside world, Patrick Bergin is a possible suitor to Joanna and Jason Priestley weighs in with a small but fairly memorable part as a bleach-blond road hustler.

The role of Joanna's mentor is filled by veteran Genevieve Bujold, who does her best with a severely underwritten role.

"Eye of the Beholder" isn't a bad

Eye of the Beholder

STARS: Ewan McGregor, Ashley Judd
DIRECTOR: Stephan Elliot
RATING: R (language, lots 'o serial murders)
GRADE: C-
FIVE WORDS: "Eye" goes off the rails.

film as much it is one that doesn't know where to go. It seems confused with itself, and after a while the director, Elliot, simply stops giving answers for The Eye's motivation. It's at that point that the movie goes off the rails. It never chooses to get back on.

Alley art gallery leaves vendors perplexed

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — Strings of bare light bulbs crisscross the alley. Further down dangles a banner complaining of police harassment.

And then the pictures: ragged young men on bikes, using one hand to steady oversized trays on their heads piled with bread, the other to steer through Cairo's vehicular pandemonium.

The photographs and the banners on display this week in a downtown alleyway are part of an unusual exhibition celebrating the working man in his medium — the street.

The reaction of the shop owners along the alley has added another element, underscoring how the debate over freedom of expression works its way even onto Egypt's streets.

At first, there was suspicion. Why this subject? Are you making fun of them? Are you for or against the government? What are you trying to say by hanging the pictures outside?

All were questions fielded by photographer Halla El-Qousy as she put up her work in preparation for the show's opening Jan. 20. The show, part of a festival publicizing the downtown art scene in Cairo, closes

Friday. Such public art displays are rare in Cairo, and depictions of poverty often raise hackles among Egyptians. And there's always wariness over even a hint of criticism of the government.

To Mohammed Warda, an employee at a flower shop at the end of the alley, the display was nonsense. "If they want to say something, they should come right out and say it instead of taking pictures," he says.

El-Qousy and fellow photographer Graham Waite say their intention was not to make political statements or criticize the government. Rather, says Waite, who is British, it's about "21st century heroes."

Their photos draw attention to a sight the people of Cairo see so often it may no longer register: the wiry young workers known as breadmen who deliver bread to homes and shops across the city. They make an average of \$3.50 to \$4.50 per day.

"They're heroes because they get up every day and do it again, and again and again," Waite says.

As unlicensed businessmen in a bureaucratic country, they also are

"If they want to say something, they should come right out and say it instead of taking pictures."

Mohammed Warda
flower shop employee

breaking the law. Aside from the dangers of traffic, the breadmen face the often more daunting prospect of arrest. The arrests are usually not an effort to enforce law, but more often a shakedown by the police.

A banner next to one photo quotes Seif, a 19-year-old breadman interviewed by El-Qousy and Waite: "I've been dragged to the police and had to pay 15 pounds (about \$4) to get out."

One employee of a shop under the banner was shocked, saying it was a topic best not discussed publicly, even if the breadmen are persecuted.

Egypt's constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but in practice most people avoid saying anything they fear might anger the government. Egyptian human rights

activists have been jailed and accused of harming the nation's reputation by pointing out police abuses.

The alley was chosen as a venue by the owner of a nearby gallery. El-Qousy says some shop owners were concerned about who would be held responsible if the authorities came around asking questions about the photos. But others gradually began to put aside old fears.

Mohammed Abdullah, an employee at an electronics shop in the alley, says the exhibit encouraged him to visit an art gallery for the first time.

The alley exhibit "raises the image of these breadmen in people's eyes and forces you to respect them for what they do and go through," Abdullah says. "It's very chic."

Sundance honor split for two films

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — The gritty boxing saga "Girlfight" and the tender sibling-reunion tale "You Can Count on Me" shared top honors at the Sundance Film Festival, the nation's top showcase for independent movies.

The two movies split the grand jury prize Saturday for best dramatic film.

"Girlfight" also won the dramatic directing award for Karyn Kusama, and "You Can Count on Me" won the Waldo Salt screenwriting award for Kenneth Lonergan, who also directed the film.

"Girlfight" stars Michelle Rodriguez as a young woman who channels her fierce temper to become a champion boxer. "You Can Count on Me" features Laura Linney and Mark Ruffalo as a sister and brother struggling to maintain a sense of family years after their parents are killed in a car crash.

Matthew Broderick co-stars in the movie.

The grand jury prize for documentary went to "Long Night's Journey Into Day," which examines four cases that came before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the aftermath of apartheid.

The documentary directing award went to Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman for "Paragraph 175," an exploration of Nazi atrocities against homosexuals.

The audience award for dramatic film, chosen by public balloting, went to "Two Family House," a 1950s portrait of an Italian-American loser who bucks tradition when he takes up with a young Irish woman and her baby of mixed race.

"Dark Days," which examines a group of New York's homeless who built their own shantytown community in an underground tunnel, won the audience award for documentary. "Saving Grace," starring Brenda Blethyn as a destitute, marijuana-growing British widow, won the audience award for world cinema.

The dramatic jury awarded two special acting honors. Janet McTeer, who won a Golden Globe last week for "Tumbleweeds," and Aidan Quinn, Pat Carroll, Jane Adams, Gregory Cook and Iris DeMent received a special jury prize for outstanding ensemble performance in "Songcatcher." McTeer stars as a musicologist in 1907 who gathers folk songs in the Appalachian backwoods.

Donal Logue won a special jury prize for outstanding performance in "The Tao of Steve." Logue plays an overweight womanizer whose pickup artistry is based on the cool aloofness of Steve McQueen. Logue's character, defending his underachieving lifestyle, utters, "Doing stuff is overrated. I mean, Hitler did a lot, but don't we all

wish he'd stayed home and gotten stoned?"

Other awards presented Saturday, the next-to-last day of the Sundance festival are as follows:

■ Cinematography award in dramatic competition: Tom Krueger, "Committed."

■ Freedom of Expression Award, documentary: "Dark Days."

■ Cinematography award in documentary competition: Andrew Young for "Americanos: Latino Life in the United States" and Marc Singer for "Dark Days."


■ Special jury prize for artistic achievement, documentary: "The Ballad of Ramblin' Jack," directed by Aiyana Elliott.

■ Special jury prize for writing, documentary: Daniel McCabe, Paul Stekler and Steve Fayer, "George Wallace: Settin' the Woods on Fire."

■ Jury prize in Latin American cinema: "Herod's Law," directed by Luis Estrada, and "No One Writes to the Colonel," directed by Arturo Ripstein.

■ Jury prize in short filmmaking: "Five Feet High and Rising," directed by Peter Sollett.

■ Honorable mention for short filmmaking: "Titler," "The Drowning Room," "This is for Betsy Hall," "Ice Fishing," "Darling International," "Friday," "Hitch," "The Bats."

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Dropped Notes

Disney to film movie on Pearl Harbor bombing

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii (AP) — The Walt Disney Co. has given the green light to a \$135 million movie about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, according to a trade publication.

"Pearl Harbor" should begin production in April for release around Memorial Day 2001, Daily Variety reported Thursday. The story line will be about two fighter pilots from Tennessee who fall in love with the same nurse.

Actors considered for the film include Charlize Theron, currently on the big screen in "The Cider House Rules," Wes Bentley, who starred in "American Beauty," and Jim Caviezel, who played a soldier in "The Thin Red Line."

The movie will be directed by Michael Bay, whose credits include "Armageddon" and "The Rock." Water scenes will be shot in the same California facility built for "Titanic."

Almodovar movie wins Best Film in Spanish festival

MADRID, Spain (AP) — Pedro Almodovar won Best Director and Best Film for "Todo Sobre Mi Madre" (All About My Mother) in the Spanish Goya Cinema Awards presented Sunday.

The movie, Spain's candidate for a foreign-language Oscar, is the story of a single woman who experiences the death of her son and goes in search of the boy's father.

Organized by the Spanish Cinema Academy, the Goya film awards take their name from the 18th century Spanish painter.

Etheridge, Shepard take stand against Proposition 22

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) — Rock star Melissa Etheridge joined the battle against a ballot measure aimed at banning state recognition of same-sex marriages, saying on Friday that the proposal was fueled by hate and bigotry.

"There are hundreds and thousands of people that I represent that are just like me that don't happen to have two Grammys that this affects. And this affects me deeply," said Etheridge, who is gay.

Proposition 22, which appears on the March 7 ballot, would prohibit California from granting legal recognition to same-sex marriages that are legally performed in other states.

Joining Etheridge at a news conference was Judy Shepard, whose son, Matthew, was beaten, tied to a fence and left to die outside Laramie, Wyo., in October 1998. "What it does is create a climate where such actions are viewed as acceptable," she said.