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The Draughtsman's Contract

Directed by Peter Greenaway. Starring Janet Suzman and Anthony Higgins.

There always seems to be someone around saying that everything would be all right if people would just act in such-and-such a way. You know, the people who say if we just behaved the way the Bible tells us to, or if we just behaved the way Karl Marx tells us to, everything would be all right.

Well, back in 1694 (the time period *The Draughtsman's Contract* is set in) a whole lot of folks were saying if we just accepted Newton's laws of the universe as applicable to human behavior, we'd all get along just fine.

The Draughtsman in the movie believes this. When he (Mr. Neville, played by Anthony Higgins) is contracted to do a series of drawings of a country estate, he sets out to do them to mathematical perfection.

He insists that the parts of the estate he is drawing be emptied of all human and animal life. So he can keep everything in mathematical perspective.

But, as Mr. Neville makes the drawings, pieces of humanity keep slipping into the scene. A coat is left hanging over a wall. A shirt is left draped over a tree. A dog is seen barking at a bathroom door.

Illogical life keeps interfering with the Newtonian universe.

Even the style of the film reinforces this point. Framed in perfectly balanced shots, *The Draughtsman's Contract* underlines itself with a sound track of 17th century British aristocrats who talk of gaining power and money, sex, and going to the bathroom. Of course, they do it in language Samuel Johnson would be proud of.

Seeing *The Draughtsman's Contract* is a fun night at the movies. It's visually beautiful and at times hilarious in its dialogue. An excellent film for people with sophisticated taste.

—John Mitchell

Under Fire

Directed by Roger Spottiswoode, starring Nick Nolte and Joanna Cassidy.

What can only be called the first pro-Marxist Hollywood film opened at the Valley River Twin last Friday. *Under Fire* is the story of a group of American journalists in Nicaragua during the 1979 revolution that overthrew the long-standing Somoza government, replacing it with the Sandinista government. In the film, two of the journalists (played by Nick Nolte and Joanna Cassidy) turn in a false story that helps the morale of the revolutionaries, which, in turn, helps to speed up the fall of the government. Even Gene Hackman, who plays an American television journalist, sympathizes with the Sandinistas. In fact, the whole film seems to be saying that no matter how objective you might want to be, when you cover a war like the Nicaraguan Revolution, you would have to be blind not to see that the Sandinistas are the good guys.

As photographed by John Alcott (*Barry Lyndon*, *A Clockwork Orange*) *Under Fire* shows

off the beauty of the tropics at the same time that it shows the violence of revolution. Under the direction of Roger Spottiswoode, Alcott's basic shot in the film is a long shot down a village street. At the end of that street people are fighting and dying. It's a reminder of the distance from which so many of us view the problems of the more Southern parts of the world.

Director Spottiswoode's main shortcoming is that he doesn't use his excellent cast to their best advantage. Nolte and Hackman have both turned in better performances than this.

Also, *Under Fire*, which is basically an action/adventure movie, is too long and too slowly paced. It spends too much time developing a love story between Nolte and Cassidy. This love

story is important to the film, however, because it is their romantic feelings which lead them to help the revolutionaries. In this respect the film harkens back to *Casablanca*. As in that film, romantic feelings of love spur people into idealistic political action. But Spottiswoode hammers this point a little too long and a little too hard.

In the long run, *Under Fire* is a film worth seeing. It stands as a reminder of the political idealism that used to be seen often in American films. An idealism that disappeared sometime during the Vietnam War. Of course, the ironic part is that this idealism should return with Americans on the side of the same sort of cause America fought against in Vietnam.

—John Mitchell

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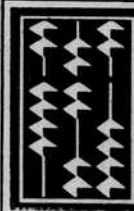
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