

CINEMA

'Powder' surprises with bold themes

Unknown Flanery brings a big-star performance to his enlightening character

By Kim Weiss

Assistant Entertainment Editor

I haven't been to the movie theater in a few months. But when I saw the previews for *Powder*, written and directed by Victor Salva, on television, I decided this was a movie I should see.

The movie focuses on Jeremy Reed, nicknamed Powder — played by Sean Patrick Flanery — who was born with shockingly white skin, almost beyond the albino coloring.

Powder was born into a rural Texan town. His mother died while giving birth to him, his father refused to accept the baby as his and his grandparents raised him in the cellar of their farmhouse.

No one has ever seen Powder before, hearing only rumors that he is physically handicapped, deformed or retarded. No one, that is, until local authorities discover Powder's grandfather has just died.

Jessie Caldwell — played by Mary Steenburgen — the director of a state boys' home, arrives at the farmhouse and ends up convincing Powder to go with her to the home.

After this point in the film, the viewer sees almost uniquely separate — but not necessarily unconnected — scenes. In fact, many scenes bring in a different set of characters each time, but they relate to one another in the end product.

For example, when Powder is eating in the boys' home cafeteria, one boy makes a somewhat provoking comment along the lines of "What are you looking at, freak?!" Then suddenly the entire cafeteria's spoons are magnetically clinging to one another in a vertical pile.

Another scene, in a science class, involves Powder and an electrode-like contraption, a Jacob's Ladder. The teacher Donald Ripley, played by Jeff Goldblum, gives a lecture about electricity, while Powder inadvertently receives electrical power from the Jacob's Ladder. After the authorities hear what happened, no one believes he should be alive or that this could happen to anyone.

At another point in the film, the viewer is taken to the woods where the boys from the home are camping, chaperoned by Sheriff Barnum — played by Lance Henriksen — and his red-neck deputy, Duncan — played by Brandon Smith.

A few of the boys and Duncan, go hunting and shoot a



Sean Patrick Flanery and Mary Steenburgen star in *Powder*.

CINEMA REVIEW

Powder

Playing at McDonald Theatre

Directed by: Victor Salva

Starring: Sean Patrick Flanery

★★★★

deer. Powder sees the pain in her eyes, and thus, he proceeds to transfer physically the deer's pain into Duncan's body so he can understand how the deer hurts.

These three significant scenes point out some underlying themes, including Powder's skin coloring, electromagnetism and the power of inner energies, in the film. Another thing to add to Powder's attributes is he is extremely intellectual, scoring off the IQ charts. All of these things interweave into the main theme — how one man, different from the rest of the townspeople, encounters and deals with the prejudice of a narrow-minded community.

But here is a question for viewers to think about when watching the film: Is it possible for them, after watching such bizarre actions, to have a willing suspension of disbelief?

It's not every day that one meets an albino person with high intellect and severe "allergic" reactions to electricity. Not to mention he can also read people's thoughts by "feeling" their inner energy.

The writer needs to do a skillful job in order that the viewer suspends his or her disbelief without much effort or even realization. The albino part is believable because people have that pigment problem. The "esp" thing is not a concept many people are aware of or

believe, but that does not mean it may not be possible. I will admit the electromagnetic theme in the movie is slightly off my usual path, but even Einstein had theories about it. So it is not impossible, just not commonly discussed.

I have two minor qualms to this otherwise good film. First is that *Powder* has been billed as a "family film." When I think of a family film, a Disney production with its animated characters or a film with an "And they lived happily ever after" ending comes to mind. I believe *Powder* is a film for families because it is didactic — It teaches them a message about prejudice toward anyone who is different. But it's not a completely warm-fuzzy film — It has a some violence and swearing.

Second is the celebrity bill. Granted, that is often done to attract audiences. But it lets me down when a particular actor is promoted as the main attraction and turns out to have a bit or only slightly significant part.

Such is the case with *Powder*. Steenburgen and Goldblum are the names one may recognize most easily in the TV previews. Steenburgen has a significant part. Goldblum's part is important but another character seems more important (besides Powder) — the sheriff. He is the one who discovered Powder was in the cellar at his grandparents' house, and he is around to try to help Powder out.

Despite my little misgivings, *Powder*, with its many sub-themes tying into the main theme, is a very good film. The actors do a great job and the makeup job isn't too bad either. So stop by the McDonald Theatre downtown and be illuminated by an interesting movie.

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