

'Compromising Positions' a scary escape

By GARRET WEYR
Staff Writer

Watching *Compromising Positions* is like reading a trashy novel: fun, fast-moving, very entertaining and occasionally corny and badly done.

Judith Singer, played by the quirkily beautiful Susan Sarandon, is a Long Island housewife looking to enrich her life. One of her friends (Judith Ivey) finds fulfillment in sculpting, one (Mary Beth Hurt) in compulsive plant growing and one (Joan Allen) in sleeping with Dr. Fleckstein (Joe Mantegna), a periodontist to what seems like all of

cinema

Long Island.

When Fleckstein is murdered in his office, Singer feels her long-dormant reporting skills stirred. She sets off to solve the case, find the murderer, or just get a story. It is this search that provides *Compromising Positions* with its plot. It seems that Fleckstein, played with memorable sleaziness by Mantegna, was not only sleeping with his nurse, his sister-in-law, his wife and the better part of his female patients, but was involved with distributing pornography as well.

Singer goes with a friend to Fleckstein's funeral ("What do they do at a Jewish funeral?" the friend asks) and under the guise of doing a story for the *New Yorker* finagles interviews with Fleckstein's in-laws and widow. From her lawyer husband (played with staid predictability by Edward Herrman)

Singer learns that Fleckstein was to appear before a Grand Jury on pornography charges. From her interviews she discovers that Fleckstein and his brother-in-law were not on good terms. From listening to her gossipy friends she is able to compile a list of just whom the good Doctor was bedding.

There is nothing improbable or fantastic in the course that leads Singer to the murderer, and the suspense created and maintained by director Frank Perry is very real and intense. At the risk of sounding sacrilegious, this film is just as scary as *Rear Window*. It's not that you care so much who did it, but at every turn the script (done very nicely by Susan Isaacs from her 1978 best-seller of the same name) and the music (by Brad Fiedel) prepare the viewer to expect the worst.

There is a scene, for instance, in which the police lieutenant on the Fleckstein case (played by the terrible but oh-so-sexy Raul Julia) follows Singer to her bedroom, where she is searching for

notes. The viewer is fully prepared for him to throw her on the bed and murder her, and the wait to find out whether he will or not is simply terrifying.

Perry has done a good job in recreating Long Island suburbia, from the health clubs to the children's toy trucks. He sets his mood and special brand of humor (offbeat, but not bizarre) right from the start. He is somewhat less successful with his actors. There are some good performances: recent Tony-award winners Judith Ivey and Joe Mantegna are marvelous; Sarandon is more than competent; and, in lesser roles, Anne De Salvo and Deborah Rush are memorable as Fleckstein's pathetic relatives. Mary Beth Hurt, however, looks like she's undergoing chemotherapy and acts even worse. And how can any director let Julia fix his soulful eyes on the camera and say (twice), "You performed remarkably?" Aside from the uneven performances, the movie offers two hours of some straightforward escapist fun.

She was only after his genes

By STEVE AUSTIN
Syndicated Columnist

Ladies & Gents, a real letter. I promise:

Dear Steven: It was a first-time experience for me. Getting picked up in a bar by a woman was a real turn on. She bought me a drink, introduced herself, and the rest was history. We were back at her place an hour later. I wanted to see her again but she refused, saying she was only into one-night stands, not long-term relationships. Well, a few months later I get a note containing her thanks to me for getting her pregnant! The letter was sent to my office, and after I finished reading it, I went to the bathroom and threw up. She was serious. But here's the kicker: She doesn't want anything to do with me, ever! She wants to be a single parent, and went on to explain that she picked me to father her child because she thought I probably had nice genes. The woman is insane. I don't think this is some

straight up

sick joke, and I'm scared to death. What should I do?

— Next Flight Out

Dear Next: My legal advisers say you should consult with an attorney pronto. Assuming she is on the level across the board, there are many options at your disposal. However, the states have their own guidelines to follow, so it would be totally inappropriate for me to offer any further advice other than to suggest you put down on paper everything you can recall about the lady and your night together. The info. will help your lawyer. Good luck. I mean it.

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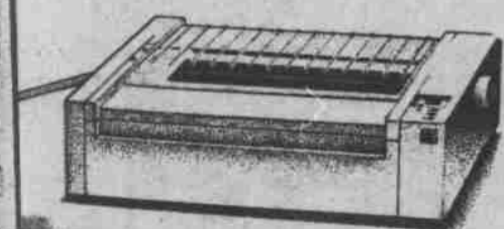
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