

# Lyne takes psychological horror beyond the cliches

## Jacob's Ladder

Tim Robbins, Danny Aiello  
and Elizabeth Pena

directed by Adrian Lyne

Plaza  
967-4737

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**C**ome here. Let's talk. Forget about philosophy. Forget about math. Let's talk about something I know about.

Let's talk about horror. When you tear away the meat and really get right down to the bone, there are two kinds of horror: interior and exterior.

Exterior means something outside of the person is doing the scaring. Most horror films are exterior. Any moron can throw a monster at the camera.

Interior happens inside of a character. It usually entails a character having mental problems. *Jacob's Ladder* falls into the second category. Interior horror films are rare and good ones are rarer still. *Jacob's Ladder* is both.

To put it simply, *Jacob's Ladder* is the story of one man's descent into hell. Jacob Singer (Tim Robbins) is a Vietnam veteran who is now working

## MIKE LONG

## Movies

for the postal service. He lives with his girlfriend Jezz (Elizabeth Pena) and has a normal life. Suddenly, he starts seeing strange things, and strange things start happening to him. Are the things he is seeing real? Why does he keep dreaming about his dead son? And perhaps the most important question, are his visions related to an incident in Vietnam that Jacob can't seem to remember?

*Jacob's Ladder* is an incredible visual experience. The audience sees everything from Jacob's point of view. It sees the hellish visions just as he does, so it has no way of knowing whether they are real or not. The editing and special effects of the hallucination scenes are perfectly synched, forcing the viewer to say, "Did I see that?"

Adrian Lyne has created a veritable feast for the eyes. He keeps the camera moving, not only to keep the movie's pace up, but to make the audience question what it is seeing. He has perfectly realized Bruce Joel Rubin's script. Perhaps Lyne's greatest feat comes during the scenes set in Vietnam. When the fighting starts, the camera becomes a whirling dervish. The scene is full of blurred im-



Jacob (Tim Robbins) is tormented by unknown forces in 'Jacob's Ladder,' a thinking person's horror film

ages and rapid cuts. I've never been in a war, but I'm sure Lyne has perfectly captured what it looks like. Lyne uses the sights and sounds of Jacob's life to give us a vicarious ride on his journey into madness.

Tim Robbins (*Bull Durham*, *Cadillac Man*) does an impressive job as Jacob. He doesn't go for the cliched "madman" performance. This is a man in the middle of a nervous breakdown, and Robbins conveys the situation superbly. His brooding and crying help the viewer to better understand his feelings. Pena is adequate as Jezz, but she just can't seem to keep her clothes on. Danny Aiello (*Moonstruck*, *Do the Right Thing*) brings a bit of light into this dark film as Jacob's chiropractor. He acts as Jacob's mentor and is charming, except when he

pops Jacob's spine (a hard scene to watch).

The one flaw in the film is the story. It is purposely confusing at some points, in order to keep the audience guessing, but the confusion grows tedious. It becomes too confusing, and one can't help but wonder if the script's pages got shuffled. The ending (stolen from a famous short story, which shall remain nameless) tries to tie everything up, but there are still a few loose ends. Still, it is a clever story, and one can't help but admire a script at one time considered the best unproduced script by *American Film Magazine*.

At one point in the film, the forgiveness of sins is mentioned. Well, Lyne and Rubin have both been forgiven. After making trash such as

*Flashdance*, *9 1/2 Weeks* and the insufferable *Fatal Attraction*, Lyne redeems himself with this visual masterpiece. Rubin, who is still getting cash from writing *Ghost*, has written a dark and brooding story that works. Who would have thought that these two men could make a great film about going insane?

*Jacob's Ladder* is the best psychological horror film in a long time. But be warned. The film is disturbing, and some scenes are hard to watch. Don't take your grandmother or a blind date. The ambiguous story also may frustrate those who like to have everything spelled out for them.

Also, don't expect to be scared out of your wits. This is a thinking person's horror film, not a cheap "jump-out-of-your-seat" movie. This is the kind of movie that will keep on scaring you long after you leave the theater.

## THE RATINGS

- — wait for the video
- — go to the dollar theater
- — only pay matinee price
- — pay full price
- — take your sister, too

TV Listings. Pages 12-15.  
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