

Cronenberg fails reputation with 'Dead Ringers'

By JAMES DEAN
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With "The Fly," David Cronenberg got it right. He attained a level of critical and financial success with a formula that he had developed over the years. The film had a good story, plenty of gratuitous and repellent gore to satisfy his die-hard fans, and a terrific performance by Jeff Goldblum in the lead role. As with any great horror movie, the audience walked out swearing never to see the film again, but after a week or two felt a strange desire to return.

The same could not be said of his new film, "Dead Ringers." The film contains only a few instances of the gore, of which Cronenberg has proved himself capable. The story is thin and disappointingly unfocused. And the whole atmosphere is rather perplexing. Only the inspired casting of Jeremy Irons in the lead roles keeps the film from drowning in its own complexities.

The plot centers around the lives of two identical male twins, Beverley and Elliot Mantle, who have made radical advances in the field of gynecology. They run their own highly successful clinic, and amuse themselves by swapping roles both inside and outside the clinic to the ignorance of their clients. It actually seems pretty good fun in the beginning. But just when it starts to become too much fun and too easy, Beverley has to go and fall in love. And from here, the story is one of slow and painful self-destruction.

Throughout the film various plot lines arise and filter away. The object of Beverley's love, a fairly famous mini-series actress with an inclination for self-torment, is diagnosed as having a unique uterine deformity (invented by Cronenberg himself) that prevents her from having children. While addicted to drugs, Beverley devel-

ops a belief that if his medical tools hurt his patients, it is not the fault of the tools but of the patients. And there is a woman who makes herself quite willingly available to both twins at the same time. But all these potentially interesting and intriguing twists come to nothing in the end.

Consequently, the film lacks tension and direction. Cronenberg fails to develop any situation sufficiently, so that the audience is able to anticipate the narrative. The fact that (except for one dream sequence) the film is largely bloodless should not affect the level of tension, but, in Cronenberg's case, it does. In trying so hard to refrain from any physical display of horror, he withdraws too far and denies the story its dramatic possibilities.

Instead, Cronenberg creates a series of painful, drawn-out images of human degradation which, while being horrific in themselves, fail to bring the audience any closer to a fundamental understanding of the characters.

The film's saving grace is Irons, who puts in a performance that the film doesn't really deserve. He handles the task of playing both twins with considerable subtlety. It cannot have been easy playing two characters who spend most of the film interacting with each other. For the film to be a success at all requires the dual role to be both convincing and understated. In the wrong hands, the film would have been a disaster. Irons establishes both characters clearly within the first 10 minutes (despite some poor editing) and manages to give the otherwise flawed plot a respectable sense of authenticity.

The only other performance of note comes from Genevieve Bujold, who, frankly, can be forgiven for the inconsistencies of her

performance since her character is given no real direction or focus in the final analysis.

On the film's side lies the technology that enables the twins to be played by the same actor so convincingly. Irons talks to himself, eats with himself and even hugs himself, all in the same frame. What could so easily have become an awkward distraction is made to seem perfectly natural. Cronenberg deserves much credit for this.

It is lucky for the film that "Roger Rabbit" has already grabbed the gimmick stakes for the summer.

With "Dead Ringers" Cronenberg has adapted his style to create a more subtle, contemplative mood. He leaves the real horrors in the minds of his characters. But in so doing he has sacrificed the essential qualities of his style that he knows best, and that he displayed so well in "The Fly." He is so busy shaping the atmosphere of the

film that he has left out the main ingredients: a good story and the presence of tension.

And it really is a pity. By shying away from everything that would have made the film interesting, Cronenberg will disappoint not only his fans, but also those who were hoping for something genuinely engrossing. He has not let the film live up to its potential, and has not let himself live up to his reputation.

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| 5. John Hiatt | Slow Turning |
| 6. Red Lorry, Yellow Lorry | Nothing's Wrong |
| 7. Folkways | A Vision Shared |
| 8. Jad Fair and Kramer | Roll Out the Barrel |
| 9. Rose of Avalanche | In Rock |
| 10. Michelle Shocked | Short, Sharp, Shocked |
| 11. Siouxsie and the Banshees | Peep Show |
| 12. The Smiths | Rank |
| 13. Dream Syndicate | Ghost Stories |
| 14. My Dad is Dead | Let's Skip the Details |
| 15. A.R. Kane | 69 |
| 16. Tom Waits | Big Time |
| 17. Screaming Tribesmen | Bones and Flowers |
| 18. James | Strip-Mine |
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