

Violence abounds in 'Bad Influence,' 'Steel'

NEW YORK (CNS) — Stylish, menacing and perverse are three words that best describe "Bad Influence" (Triumph), a thriller about a good yuppie and a bad drifter who accidentally cross paths and ultimately destroy each other's lives.

Cunning opportunist Alex (Rob Lowe) knows an easy mark when he sees one, and young, wimpish investment analyst Michael Boll (James Spader) fits the bill. Oversaturated with big bucks, expensive toys, a beautiful yuppie fiancée, a pending promotion and chronic stomach pains, Michael is not yet 30 but is well on his way to Mylanta heaven.

After a lifetime of repressing his natural instincts, Michael throws caution to the wind, boozes it up, snorts some cocaine and proceeds to join Alex in some seedy nightlife. He has sex with bohemian Claire (Lisa Zane), a pick-up at a wild Los Angeles nightclub. The duo rob some convenience stores and apparently beat up the only competitor for Michael's big promotion (Michael was too drunk to remember the attack, but Alex reminds him).

Alex's recollection of this last incident shocks Michael into tossing Alex out on his ear, but the Faustian bond has been sealed. Alex does not go gently into the night. He has Michael where he wants him. A mouse in a trap, Michael is set up for the kill in more ways than one.

Director Curtis Hanson ("Bedroom Window") and writer David Koepp ("Apartment Zero") nicely contrast Michael's suffocatingly sterile world with Alex's bewildering decadent existence. Spader ("sex, lies, & videotape") is excellent as a wimpish WASP so obsessed with his career and acquisitions that his life is a cipher of false promise. And Lowe is on target as Michael's grinning tempter.

"Bad Influence" pulls the dynamics of the Faust-Mephistopheles legend into the "sex, lies, & videotape" age with style



Rob Lowe plays a drifter in his new film "Bad Influence." AP/Wide World Photos

and wit, but dabbles with some decadent and grisly imagery that may be off-putting to some audiences.

Due to rough language, recreational drug use, some graphic, grisly violence and several explicit sexual scenes involving nudity and, in one instance, a ménage à trois, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

Blue Steel

Visually stunning and graphically violent, "Blue Steel" (MGM/UA) is a cop thriller with a twist. This time the director is a woman, the cop is a woman, but the

bottom line is still the same because a woman is still the star victim.

Here, the hackneyed woman-as-victim theme is given some credibility since the woman is a rookie cop still very green around the edges. Her first day on the job, New York police officer Megan Turner (Jamie Lee Curtis) blasts an armed robber to kingdom come. Unfortunately, his gun and credible witnesses mysteriously disappear from the site and she is suspended for having shot an unarmed man.

The gun, an obsessional image for filmmaker Kathryn Bigelow, lands in the hands of a dashing commodities broker, Eugene Hunt (Ron Silver), a closet psychopath. A witness to the supermarket heist that deep-

frozen Turner, Hunt becomes obsessed with Turner's powerful way with a gun.

He begins slaughtering New Yorkers at will and scratches Turner's name on his bullets, which leads to her tenuous reinstatement and a chilling cat-and-mouse game between the two that leads to much carnage.

Curtis is excellent as Turner, a tense, hard-edged rookie with a soft heart who has dreamt of being a cop since childhood. However, her involvement with men probably always has been problematic. She immediately antagonizes her male partner and her male superiors with her nervous trigger finger.

Silver (so fine in "Enemies, A Love Story") is a gruesome maniac with brains and brawn who talks to unidentified voices, and grins and grits his teeth a lot.

Director and co-writer Bigelow, who began her career as an abstract painter, captures a cold, blue, angular New York skyline, filled with interminable rain and startling images. Her film is beautiful to look at, but her aim is unclear.

Due to much gratuitous, grisly violence, some profanity and a sexual incident with flashes of nudity, the U.S.C.C. classification is O — morally offensive. The M.P.A.A. rating is R — restricted.

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