

Lack of focus hurts promising fantasy films

NEW YORK (CNS) — TV heartthrob Richard Grieco ("21 Jump Street," "Booker") gets a dubious shot at movie stardom in "If Looks Could Kill" (Warner Bros.).

On a class trip to Europe under the stern eyes of his French teacher (Robin Bartlett), cool dude Michael Corben (Grieco) is mistaken for a U.S. secret agent using the same name.

British Intelligence presses him into service, providing him with the kind of toys adolescent males dream about: glasses that can see through clothes and a red convertible with all kinds of "007-like" options.

Meanwhile as archvillain Steranko (Roger Rees) plots to overtake Europe by killing off all its leaders in one fell swoop, his whip-wielding sidekick Ilsa Grunt (Linda Hunt) unleashes assassins on Michael.

After the young Yank evades the deadly seduction of one woman (Carole Davis) and picks up a beautiful ally (Gabrielle Anwar), they are unceremoniously captured and dumped in Steranko's chateau. There his teacher and his whole class are waiting to be saved by him — suspended as they are in a cage above a vat of molten gold. Suddenly it's Michael "Rambo" Corben to the rescue in a clamorous climax of all kinds of explosive firepower.

Snappy stunts and flashy special effects may make director William Dear's spoof look ambitious, but it's still a clunky clincher.

Lack of focus makes the film sillier by the moment as it tries to be a James Bond, Indiana Jones and teen-age fantasy film all at once.



Meryl Streep and Albert Brooks star in *Defending Your Life*, a humorous look at entry into the afterlife.

Because of much comic-book violence and some sexual innuendo, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'Defending Your Life'

According to writer-star-director Albert Brooks, the experience after death consists of "Defending Your Life" (Warner Bros.).

When Daniel Miller (Brooks) comes to

— after a head-on encounter with a bus — he is put on a tram to Judgment City, a pleasant Earth-like environment where the help are endlessly polite, the recently dead all wear classic white robes and you can gorge and never gain weight on the best eats in the universe.

However, Judgment City is not without stress. Miller and his mostly older companions are only there temporarily while judges and lawyers re-examine their lives on giant screens to determine what's next: on to a higher plane of existence or demotion back to Earth to try again, where only

3 per cent of brain power is usually used.

After Miller's bland life of unfulfilled potential, his chances for advancement look poor, especially with a razor-sharp prosecutor (Lee Grant) dissecting his every earthly blunder. Cheering him on before two judges is his defense lawyer Diamond (Rip Torn), who tries to make him out to be a brave and decent man.

Miller seems resigned to accept his fate until a chance meeting with another young accident victim, Julia (Meryl Streep), makes him realize he's finally found the love of his life, only too late. Clearly, the accomplished Julia is a shoo-in for promotion to another corner of the cosmos without him.

Brooks has fashioned a smoothly soothing comedy-fantasy, full of whimsy, but quite ill-defined at its core.

Even Brooks as everyman Miller seems unclear about what he is being judged on. Though told the "numero uno" transgression is living in fear, he seems most criticized for not making enough money while on Earth. The focus on where the characters are going, and for that matter, where the Judgment City citizens came from, is vague indeed. Ditto for any mention of God.

Ultimately, "Defending Your Life" is a fragile fantasy saluting the redemptive powers of love, with a great cast, but its surface charms never really get down to earth.

Due to references to re-incarnation and extremely mild sexual innuendo, the USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Dining Around the Diocese

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Avon, NY 14414
(minutes off 390, exit 10)
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While you're there, remember to choose a fine wine from their extensive wine list. Re-open for yet another season of splendid dining, visit the Conesus Inn soon... "For The Prime of Your Life." Just ten minutes from exit 9 off 390. Call today for reservations.

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1-657-7120

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