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EROS

(FRANCE-ITALY-LUXEMBOURG)

A Warner Independent Pictures release (U.S.) of a Roissy Films, Solaris, Cite Films Prods., Fandango, Delux production with Block2 Pictures, Ipso Facto. Produced by Raphael Berdugo, Stephane Tchal Gadjieff, Jacques Bar, Domenico Procacci. Linking sequences, Lorenzo Mattotti, in collaboration with Studio Eye; song, Caetano Veloso. Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival (Masters), Sept. 15, 2004. (Also in Venice Film Festival — noncompeting.) Running time: 109 MIN.

THE HAND

A Jet Tone Films production. Produced by Wong Kar-wai, Jacky Pang Yee Wah. Executive producer, Chan Ye Chang.

Directed, written by Wong Kar Wai. Camera (color), Christopher Doyle; editor, William Chang Suk Ping; music, Peer Raben; production, costume designer, William Chang Suk Ping; art director, Alfred Yau Wai Ming; sound (Dolby Digital/SDDS/DTS), Claude Letessier, Tu Duu Chih; line producer, Alice Chan; assistant director, Lee Chiu Wah.

With: Gong Li, Chang Chen, Tin Fung. (Mandarin dialogue)

EQUILIBRIUM

An Ipso Facto production. Produced by Gregory Jacobs.

Directed, written by Steven Soderbergh. Camera (color), Peter Andrews; editor, Mary Ann Bernard; music, Chico O'Farrill, Tito Puente; production designer, Philip Messina; set decorator, Kristen Toscano Messina; costume designer, Milena Canonero; sound (Dolby Digital/SDDS/DTS), Paul Ledford; assistant director, Jacobs; casting, Debra Zane.

With: Robert Downey Jr., Alan Arkin, Ele Keats.

(English dialogue)

THE DANGEROUS THREAD OF THINGS

A Roissy Films, Solaris, Cite Films Prods., Fandango, Delux production. Produced by Berdugo, Tchal Gadjieff, Bar, Procacci. Executive producer, Danielle Rosencranz.

Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay, Antonioni, Tonino Guerra, based on Antonioni's book, "Quel Bowling sul Tevere." Camera (color), Marco Pontecorvo; editor, Claudio Di Mauro; music, Enrica Antonioni, Vinicio Milani; production designer, Stefano Lucci; costume designer, Carin Berger; sound (Dolby Digital/SDDS/DTS), Georges Prat; line producers, Marcantonio Borghese, Valeria Licurgo; associate producer, Guy Aziza; assistant director, David Putorti.

With: Christopher Buchholz, Regina Nemni, Luisa Ranieri.

(English, Italian dialogue)

By DAVID ROONEY

What might have been a cinephile's wet dream turns out instead to be seductive, stimulating and sodden, in that order, in the three-chapter reflection on love and desire, "Eros." Wong Kar Wai conjures a melancholy reverie that intoxicates despite its air of *deja vu*, while Steven Soderbergh cooks up witty wordplay and a masterclass in offbeat comic acting. But Michelangelo Antonioni, around whom the project was assembled, indulges in desultory Eurotrash horndoggery that feebly mimics his elliptical 1960s dramas. The venture's extreme unevenness will make it commercially viable mainly as a DVD curio.

Paris-based producer Stephane Tchal Gadjieff fostered the project after working with Antonioni in 1995 on "Beyond the Clouds," made 10 years after the 92-year-old director was partially paralyzed by a stroke that deprived him of the power of speech. Antonioni's segment was filmed in Tuscany in 2001.

Soderbergh — who stepped in when Pedro Almodovar dropped out of the project — and Wong shot their segments almost two years later. Warner Independent has U.S. rights through its affiliation with Soderbergh.

Very much in the vein of "In the Mood for Love" but partly inspired by the SARS epidemic, Wong's "The Hand" chronicles an aching, unrequited love fueled by the erotic power of touch. Sexually inexperienced young tailor's apprentice Zhang (Chang Chen) is sent to the home of beautiful courtesan Hua (Gong Li) for a fitting. When Zhang's attempts to hide his arousal fail, Hua takes the matter in hand, telling him to remember her womanly touch when he's making her clothes.

Shot with fetishistic sensual closeness by Wong's regular collaborator Christopher Doyle and kitted out in gorgeous 1960s period decor and silky threads, the impeccably designed, exquisitely acted film parallels Zhang's growing skill as a dressmaker with Hua's steady downfall from high-class courtesan

to streetwalker.

From the first strains of the teasing Afro-Cuban jazz that colors its soundtrack, Soderbergh's "Equilibrium" is a more playful affair. Set in 1955 New York, it unfolds mainly during a session between agitated advertising exec Nick Penrose (Robert Downey Jr.) and his amusingly distracted therapist Dr. Pearl (Alan Arkin).

The story begins with Nick's recurring dream of a cool beauty (Ele Keats) slinking away naked from his bedroom to bathe and dress. But the writer-director is less concerned with erotic imaginings than with the rattled mental state they induce, manifested in Nick's marital anxieties, his fixation with an office colleague's toupee and the invention of the snooze alarm.

Peter Andrews' noirish B&W lensing of the therapy session gives this buoyant neurotica sketch a visual kick. But the chief attraction is the sustained ricochet of wry comedy between Downey and Arkin.

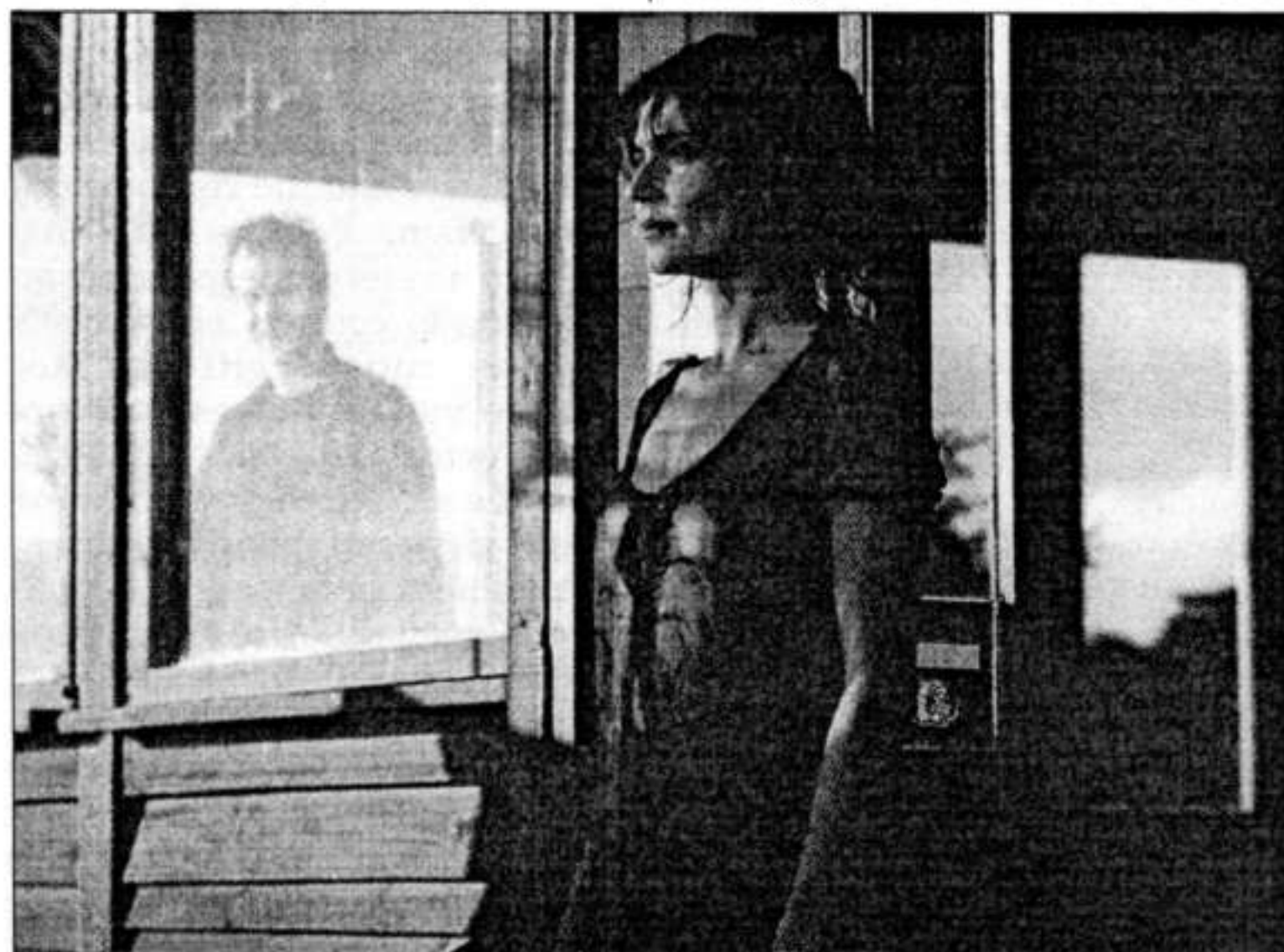
Scripted from three of his short stories by the director with veteran collaborator Tonino Guerra, Antonioni's "The Dangerous Thread of Things" has no thread to speak of beyond its antiquated echoes of the existentialist maestro's classic ruminations on the communication impasse between men and women.

Contrived enigma follows bored couple Christopher (Christopher Buchholz) and Chloe (Regina Nemni), who speak exclusively in non sequiturs rendered even more risible by their stilted English dialogue. Their marital malaise prompts Christopher to follow curvy horsewoman Linda (Luisa Ranieri) home for some afternoon delight. Later, while Christopher is in voluntary exile in Paris, Linda and Chloe dance naked on opposite ends of a beach.

There may be some restraint shown in Antonioni's decision to stop short of the hinted lesbo-action in the two women's encounter but that's where the subtlety begins and ends. Despite a certain visual elegance, this pervy posturing unintentionally but cruelly parodies the vintage work and violates the dignity of a once-significant filmmaker. It even

makes the worst of the "Erotic Tales" series from several years back look suddenly less embarrassing.

The ponderousness of Antonioni's interlude carries through to the linking sequences of erotic drawings by illustrator Lorenzo Mattotti. These are accompanied by an original Caetano Veloso song inspired by the Italian director, which sounds like it was composed under heavy medication.



LOVE STORY: Christopher Buchholz and Regina Nemni appear in "The Dangerous Thread of Things," one of three chapters in "Eros."

Variety

9/27/4-10/3/4, p 80