

Movie Review: 'Fay Grim'

by David_Elliott

Parker Posey has seemed a little grim in recent years, so "Fay Grim" is a good fit for her. As pinballing Fay, always off balance but never defeated, Posey's famous hip-girl charm has become womanly and packs more punch.

'FAY GRIM' - Parker Posey and Jeff Goldblum star in the offbeat comedy 'Fay Grim.' CNS Photo courtesy of Richard Sylvarnes. Hal Hartley's crafty entertainment derives from his 1998 art-cult film "Henry Fool." Henry (Thomas Jay Ryan), the ratty spitball of pontifical posturing whose diaries may out-gab Casanova's, is mostly gone, even reported dead.

But the scattered diaries, recurrent rumors from foreign lands and the ambivalence of wife/widow Fay cause Henry to hover still, like Harry Lime in "The Third Man." Also festering is Fay's brother, Simon, cult bard mentored by Henry, now "the incarcerated garbage-man poet of Woodside, Queens."

A chance to spring Simon from the can comes after pesky CIA agent Fulbright, a prodigy of alert paranoia, maneuvers Fay into espionage abroad that may find some of the lost diaries, even Henry. Fulbright is Jeff Goldblum, deadpan but less teasingly sardonic than usual.

Spritzing along on a trim budget, using Paris and Istanbul without gawking, crisp with digital images, a sharpie with dialogue, Hartley (now based in Berlin) commands his game. He impishly stirs the plot with a swizzle stick of dry humor, enjoyable if you're a bit sick of the stuffed and earnestly half-baked Bond, "Bourne" and "Mission: Impossible" series.

Elina Lowensohn is a Russian emigre prone to trouble, Liam Aiken is Fay's dourly amusing teen son, and magnetic Anatole Taubman is a fanatical jihadist of remarkably human sympathy. This nut with a heart likes crazy Henry, who pops back into action with his alley-dog energy.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Snapper lines bite Homeland Security issues and "The Da Vinci Code" craze. "Fay Grim" is an exotic intriguer that kids itself, its ancestors being "The Lady Vanishes" and "Beat the Devil." Leaning rakishly into the tilted camera angles is the playful genii of Orson Welles' "Journey Into Fear," "Lady From Shanghai," "Mr. Arkadin," even a scene echoing "The Trial."

This may be too much (or not enough) for some. Violence is minimal, the basic thermostat being set by dotty but decent Fay. Parker Posey is one of the indie queens (Hope Davis, Rachel Griffiths, Julie Delpy, Lily Taylor, Laurie Metcalf) used feebly by Hollywood, but in the hands of Hartley she is the star needed and right on schedule.

A Magnolia Films release. Director, writer: Hal Hartley. Cast: Parker Posey, Jeff Goldblum, James Urbaniak, Saffron Burrows, Liam Aiken, Thomas Jay Ryan, Anatole Taubman. Running time: 1 hour, 55 minutes. Rated R. 3 stars.

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