


# 'Ruby' Another JFK Murder Plot Fantasy

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Perhaps this has nothing to do with the quality of "Ruby," but it has everything to do with the experience of it: the disclaimer, at the end, which says that much of the movie is fictional, including the character of stripper Candy Cane and Jack Ruby's relationship with her.

Just about all that "Ruby" deals with is this fictional relationship, and to find out that it has no basis in truth is to feel cheated. This may be a little bit silly — it's naive to expect movies to be perfectly true, and all that. Yet if a movie is called "Ruby," you kind of expect it to be about Ruby. Otherwise, they might just as well have called the picture, "Pudgy Strip Joint Owner."

"Ruby," like "JFK," is another film to hammer together a theory about the assassination of President Kennedy. In "JFK," everybody was in on it with the possible exception of Jackie; in "Ruby"

 **RUBY: Drama. Starring Danny Aiello and Sherilyn Fenn. Directed by John Mackenzie. (R. 100 minutes. At Bay Area theaters.)**

the culprit is the Mafia acting in cooperation with the CIA.

"Ruby" is going to suffer from the inevitable comparisons with "JFK," because while "JFK" was an exciting thriller that made a chilling case for itself, "Ruby" is disjointed and unconvincing. For one thing, the central act of the film, the movie's reason for being — Ruby's murder of Lee Harvey Oswald — comes across as utterly unmotivated. "I did it so one day everything's gotta be brought out into the open," Ruby later explains. Try to figure that one.

I suspect that part of the movie's problem is the result of its strategy to make Jack Ruby a sympathetic figure. Ruby is presented as a stumbling small-timer just trying to stay afloat, a decent



Sherilyn Fenn plays fictional stripper Candy Cane in the Dallas club run by Jack Ruby (Danny Aiello)

man forced to function in a bad world. By making Ruby too clean, the picture also leaves Ruby — and the viewer — in the dark too often. Ruby has no idea of what is going on and can only react. When he finally reacts to the confusion around him by killing Oswald, we can't

begin to understand it.

Danny Aiello stars as Jack Ruby, a burlesque club owner and small-time gangster who, at the start of the picture, is getting squeezed on all sides.

# 'Ruby' Has Its Own JFK Theory

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The FBI wants him to act as a spy; the CIA is tapping his phone; the mob is asking him to do some unsavory jobs; and his club is going broke.

One thing good happens. In a bus station Jack meets Sheryl Ann (Sherilyn Fenn), a young blonde who, under the new name Candy Cane, soon becomes the star attraction at Jack's club. She and Jack have a warm father-daughter type relationship, though there is an undercurrent of attraction, too. As Candy Cane, Fenn ("Twin Peaks") couldn't be sweeter, and Aiello brings a wistful sensitivity to his scenes with her.

"Ruby" is a hard movie to follow. It's told from Ruby's vantage point, and he is the one guy who has absolutely no idea what is going on. The picture travels to Cuba, where Ruby smuggles a deported gangster into the United States. In Vegas, Ruby sits at a table with a group of organized-crime leaders, while a Frank Sinatra-type singer performs to an audience that also includes the president of the United States. "What is he doing here?" Ruby asks. He's not the only one who would like to know.

Offscreen, Candy Cane winds up in bed with Kennedy, because, after all, that's how it was done in those days. You can see how, with few changes in Stephen Davis' screenplay, director John MacKenzie could have turned "Ruby" into a funny and very offensive black comedy. All the cliches are here, ready to be exaggerated just one bit more. Instead, the tone is dead-ly serious.

There are some nice individual scenes in "Ruby": a cryptic conversation between Ruby and a CIA agent (Arliiss Howard); a good brawl between Ruby and Candy Cane's estranged husband ("Make this the last time you take your disappointment in life out on Jack Ruby!"); and while MacKenzie slows down the action and diffuses the impact of the Kennedy assassination scene, the shooting of Oswald is intrinsically interesting. But somehow it all doesn't add up — neither as assassination theory, nor, more important, as entertainment.

By the way, Oswald is played by Willie Garson, who is far too balding for the role. Oswald may have been losing it a little in front, but Garson is much thinner on top and even has a bald spot. He looks more like what Oswald would have had to look forward to had he lived.