

FILM

'Ruby' falls early and never gets up

By David Kronke
Daily News Film Critic

The gospel according to "Ruby": Lee Harvey Oswald didn't act alone, but Jack Ruby did.

Those who complained that "JFK" played fast and loose with certain facts will almost certainly have convictions over "Ruby," the movie that examines Ruby's role — outside of killing Oswald — in Kennedy's assassination.

Filmgoers just interested in a good yarn likewise will be disappointed. "Ruby" spends a lot of time with seemingly peripheral activities while ignoring other key moments, and therefore is a little plodding and more than a little murky in its motivations. In fact, "JFK" covered a lot more ground

in a far clearer fashion than "Ruby," which picks and chooses certain facets of the assassination but presents them in a somewhat confusing manner.

The movie depicts Ruby as a minor-league mob player, a man safely out of the loop of the bigger plans going down that fateful November day, but aware of certain aspects of the conspiracy. On the other hand, he also comes off as a loose cannon that neither the mob nor the CIA could control.

The film follows Ruby (Danny Aiello) in his role as strip club manager, mob whipping boy, friend to corrupt cops and bush-league FBI informant. In a bus depot, he befriends Sheryl Ann (Sheryl Fenn of "Twin Peaks") in a role the filmmakers admit is pure fiction), a battered woman fleeing from her husband, and soon hires her as a dancer.

Ruby and Sheryl Ann attend a high-level mob conference in Las Vegas, where disgruntled gangsters make vaguely menacing comments and she beds down with Kennedy. They later witness the assassination — heavy-handedly presented to the strains of "Amazing Grace" — and their world goes a little nuts.

But not as nuts as the movie goes. Simply put, there's nothing here that sheds any truthful or helpful light on one of the most galvanizing events of the late 20th century, merely hype and nonsense.

For example, we see Ruby at the Dallas Morning News offices at the moment Kennedy is murdered, and this is fine — historians, as best as they have been able, have placed Ruby at the newspaper, more or less, at that time. The big laugh here is that the film

THE FACTS

- The film: "Ruby" (R).
- The stars: Danny Aiello, Sheryl Fenn, Artiss Howard.
- Behind the scenes: Directed by John Mackenzie. Written by Stephen Davis. Produced by Sigurton Sigvatsson and Steve Golin. Released by Triumph.
- Running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes.
- Playing: Citywide.
- Our rating: ★★

shows Ruby at the paper looking out a window watching a second gunman running across the Dealey Plaza overpass.

In reality, the newspaper is a good six blocks — six well-populated, well-built-up blocks — away from Dealey Plaza, which means

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Brother calls Ruby portrayal 'very real'

By Amy Wilson

Knight-Ridder Tribune News Wire

DETROIT — Earl Ruby has endured a lot in the 30 years he's spent defending the name of his famous brother, Jack.

Tuesday he endured still more.

In a darkened viewing room, the Detroit businessman watched "Ruby," a new movie due out today, starring Danny Aiello in the title role.

It made Earl laugh. It made him cry. It made him mad. And in the end, he called it "disgusting."

The film was made without the family's participation. It may well decide what a new generation of Americans will believe about his brother:

That Jack Ruby, the man who shot the man who shot John F. Kennedy, was a part of an intricate CIA plot to assassinate world leaders.

That he became the CIA's weapon of choice because organized crime leaders wanted it so.

That Jack Ruby knew about this, fancied himself a major player, but instead was a patsy to be pitied; a small-time hood, a one-time hit man, a man seemingly without real friends or real family.

Earl Ruby knows that movies create fiction. But this one puts

words in his brother's mouth, motives in his pockets and guns in his hands. It has done something worse to Earl Ruby.

It made him remember.

The 76-year-old financed his brother's ventures. He paid for his unsuccessful defense in the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald. He watched him die of cancer in 1967, insolvent and unredeemed.

And he has spent almost three decades talking and testifying and swearing to a bevy of Congress members, a lot of talk-show hosts and countless journalists that Jack Ruby was just a regular guy who loved his country and did what "every red-blooded American" wanted to do.

At the Detroit media preview of the film, Jack Ruby's baby brother moved uneasily in his seat as he sought to escape the last painful minutes of the film, the minutes that show his brother being given an injection in a veiled hint that he might have been murdered in prison.

"To hear him screaming in the cell, that was too hard," Ruby said. "I pictured that that was Jack."

Earl said that, at times, Aiello sounded like his brother and, except for some extra weight, looked like him, too.

Ruby

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Ruby would've needed a high-powered, hundred-foot-tall periscope to see anything of the assassination site from such a vantage point. And because the film was shot on location, the filmmakers were aware of this obvious discrepancy but decided to run with their conceit anyway.

The film likewise neglects to follow Ruby to Parkland Hospital, where the president was taken after the shooting and where many researchers have persuasively placed him, or at the Dallas Police Department press conference that Ruby infamously crashed (and corrected the police chief on Oswald's Cuban ties).

Moreover, the film has a confused time frame and is profoundly incapable of linking any of its disparate elements. This much is known — the mob was furious at Kennedy. Organized crime is credited with helping him win Illinois in the very close 1960 election, and the ingrate sicked the Justice Department on them.

But how the CIA and the mob got together goes unexplained. And why Ruby thought that killing Oswald — who is depicted as the patsy he claimed he was — would help bring out the truth is a baffling mystery. Ruby is shown as being angry at the powers that be-

littled him, but his action only ended up serving their cause.

Surprisingly, this is one of the normally reliable Aiello's weaker performances, though he's not helped much by the hackneyed, tough-guy dialogue the screenplay serves up. Fenn plays a cipher — not for a moment do we understand why she's putting up with the lowlife types she hangs out with.

Only Arliss Howard, as an enigmatic CIA agent, brings life to this melodrama. He gives a wonderfully eccentric performance, especially in a standout scene in which he trades telling elliptical quips with Ruby, who has no idea what is being discussed.

Sheerly by the power of its subject matter does "Ruby" manage to be intriguing. But the film doesn't deliver the goods, and everyone knows that when a mobster doesn't deliver the goods, he winds up DOA. Which will likely be this film's fate at the box office.



Danny Aiello is Jack Ruby in the John Mackenzie film, "Ruby."

COMPARING 'JFK' WITH 'RUBY'

You're at a stuffy party and some bore starts talking conspiracy theories in the movies. Clip and save this handy chart comparing "JFK" and "Ruby" and you'll not only save yourself the trouble of sitting through five hours of historical and hysterical minutiae, but you'll also shut that egghead right up!

	"JFK"	"Ruby"
■ Source material	Two conspiracy books: Jim Marrs' "Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy" and Jim Garrison's "On the Trail of the Assassins."	A play, Stephen Davis' "Love Field."
■ Who killed JFK?	Kennedy was executed by a shadowy underworld of the United States government composed of members of the military-industrial complex, the CIA, the FBI, the mob, anti-Castro Cubans and assorted other right-wing lunatics — heck, just about everybody in Dealey Plaza on Nov. 22, 1963, could've been packing heat that day.	The mob and the CIA.
■ Why?	Anger about his decisions to splinter the powers of the CIA and withdraw troops from Vietnam.	The mob was mad because they helped Kennedy get elected in 1960 and the only way he could think of thanking them was to destroy organized crime. The CIA was mad because, even though they didn't help Kennedy get elected, he was trying to destroy them, too.
■ Why did Jack Ruby kill Lee Harvey Oswald?	He was under orders from the mob and the CIA to keep Oswald from talking.	He was hacked off at the mob and the CIA.
■ Number of film stocks used to depict assassination	Countless.	Two.
■ Depiction of JFK	Tireless champion of the people.	Tireless womanizer.
■ Depiction of Ruby	As played by Brian Doyle Murray, Ruby was a fat, nervous, sweaty man who was merely a cog in the machinery.	As played by Danny Aiello, Ruby was a fat, nervous, sweaty man who was merely a cog in the machinery, but also a loose cannon.
■ Depiction of Oswald	As played by Gary Oldman, Oswald was an enigmatic man with ties to military intelligence and possibly the CIA, defined only by the era's newsreel footage.	As played by Willie Garson, Oswald looked like a small company's nerdy bookkeeper.
■ Depiction of David Ferrie	As played by Joe Pesci, Ferrie was a panicky homosexual whose wig (Ferrie suffered from alopecia, or complete lack of hair) bounces up and down distressingly during his big scene.	As played by Tobin Bell, Ferrie's shock of red hair was his own, but it was poorly cut and he had no eyebrows. His oily demeanor was quietly menacing, but he got no big scenes, though he shows up at historically inaccurate times.
■ Depiction of Warren Commission	Complete morons.	Not really mentioned.
■ Fictional characters	Willie O'Keefe (Kevin Bacon), based on a composite of actual witnesses; "X" (Donald Sutherland), a fast-talking military official whose purpose is to deliver large chunks of exposition at a breakneck pace; dumb researcher (Michael Rooker) who asks that everything be explained twice for the benefit of slow audience members.	Sheryl Ann (Sherilyn Fenn), a stripper who slept with Kennedy but had nothing else to do with virtually any other part of the story; Maxwell (Arliss Howard), a wacky CIA agent; numerous mobsters.
■ Dumbest line	Sissy Spacek (in Southern accent) to Kevin Costner: "Jim, ah think you love John Kennedy more than you do yore own family."	Ruby, in an apparent daze, to no one in particular: "It feels like a dream — yeah, that's it, a dream."
■ Film's political leanings	Ultra-liberal.	Hard to tell.
■ Point of movie	That Americans have been routinely lied to by an omnipotent status quo that has stripped the land of its idealism and left in its wake a cynical populace content to let the country rot away to nothing.	Hard to tell.

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