

flaws beyond its extremely modest ambitions. What feels like the passage of two weeks at one point turns out to have been several years: this distorted time sense may be part of the film's point, but it comes across as sloppy, baffling, and frankly unbelievable. The film's characterization of women falls somewhere between Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon. And the coda, set four decades later, features the worst makeup to appear outside of a 20th Century Fox production in recent memory. (Andy Klein)

■ Music Hall, Esquire

Ruby

Yet another exploration of the Kennedy assassination, *Ruby* makes Oliver Stone's *JFK* look subtle and reasonable. Danny Aiello plays Jack Ruby — remember him? — onetime Mafia errand boy, now running a medium-cheap strip joint in Dallas. We meet Jack as a drug dealer and informant for the Dallas cops, just as the mob decides to reactivate his career.

It would be pointless to go into details of Jack's mob activities, since, in the long run, they make no sense — in which regard they are representative of the film as a whole. The CIA is implicated in all the sordid goings-on by the presence of a Mysterious Stranger (played with low-key relish by Arliss Howard). The M.S. never says he is CIA, but he doesn't deny it either, as he materializes and dematerializes from the shadows like a Cheshire cat.

Of the film's many missteps, the worst by far is the creation of a vaguely romantic subplot. Jack hires a young, Monroe-look-alike stripper (Sherilyn Fenn) who, in no time flat, is maybe sleeping with mob boss Santos Alicante (Marc Lawrence) — presumably a stand-in for Santos Trafficante. Were the film makers afraid of lawsuits or what?

The stripper, whom Jack renames Candy Cane, meets and beds down Jack Kennedy at a Las Vegas casino — did the president actually frequent Vegas while in office? — making her a kind of conflation of Judith Campbell Exner and other real-life figures. This scene is the funniest in the film, as Candy, clad only in a frilly nightgown, prances down the hotel corridor and into a room boldly labeled Presidential Suite. "He's got some pussy coming up," a

Secret Service man utters into his walkie-talkie.

In the end, after Jack is in jail for shooting Oswald, Candy visits him. "I love you, Jack," she says, as the lyrical "Love Theme from *Ruby*" swells on the sound track. "I love you too, Candy," he replies, as the laughter swells in the auditorium.

What should have been — and was presumably meant to be — the film's focus is Ruby's motivation for shooting Oswald. It is this very issue that director John MacKenzie and screenwriter Stephen Davis (working from his stage play) fumble most badly. As best as I could tell, Jack is pissed at the way the mob treats people (particularly him) and is going to blow the lid off this whole conspiracy business by silencing the case's most important witness. Of course, nobody ever said he was a mental giant.

Not even Danny Aiello — nor any of several fine actors — can bring much dignity to this hash. MacKenzie provides a dark visual style, which is pleasing until it grows at odds with the increasingly (and unintentionally) comic tone of everything else. (Andy Klein)

■ AMC Santa Monica, AMC Century, Plaza, Chinese, Vogue, Grande, Cineplex Universal, Fairfax

UNREVIEWED OPENINGS

The Fourth Animation Celebration. A collection of the best short works from last fall's International Animation Competition, held (as always) right here in Los Angeles. (AK) (Nuart, starts Wed)

Ladybugs. Rodney in a dress: need we really say more? In addition to Mr. Dangerfield, the cast includes Jackée and Jonathan Brandis. Directed by Sidney J. Furie, who has the honor of having made last year's very worst film, *The Taking of Beverly Hills*. Can he make it two years in a row? (AK) (AMC Santa Monica, AMC Century, National, Chinese, Culver 6, Cineplex Universal, Cineplex Beverly, UA Marina)

The Power of One. The Apartheid Kid: Director John Avildsen and screenwriter Robert Mark Kamen — the team that gave us *The Karate Kid* — take their act to Zimbabwe to film Bryce Courtenay's book of about a