Jane Fonda stars in creaky movie "Old Gringo"

Entertainment

FILMETER



ROBERT DIMATTEO

In Movie Theaters

OLD GRINGO (R) Jane Fonda has spent too much of the last-decade playing role models instead of roles. That tendency continues in this soggy. stilted historical romance adapted from a Carlos Fuentes novel in which the the 51-year-old star plays - are you ready - a spinsterish governess in her mid-30s.

Trying to build a new life for herself, the governess goes to Mexico to work for a wealthy family, only to find that she has wandered into the middle of the Mexican Revolution. Also turning up is the real-life writer Ambrose Bierce (Gregory Peck), that great cynic who wrote "The Devil's Dictionary" and who actually spent his last days in Mexico.

According to the movie, Bierce is very attracted to the governess, but he's a bit long in the tooth to start a full-blown love affair. That isn't the case with a hot-blooded general (Jimmy Smits) in Pancho Villa's revolutionary army, who sweeps the governess off her feet. Spurred on by these two men, the woman awakens to new possibilities, loses her virginity to the general, and discovers her political consciousness.

No one awakens to politics the way Jane Fonda does. It's something she's done several times before - most memorably in "Coming Home." But her awakening here is corny. Perhaps inadvertently, this triangle story turns into one more old-fashioned romance in which a woman seems to fulfill herself through the love of men. So much for Fonda's much-vaunted feminism.

In almost every respect, the movie plays like a heavy, artsy, old-time epic. Throughout, the camera seems wowed by the sets, but the actors don't stand much of a chance. Smits smoiders; sentimental favorite Peck wheezes a lot; and Fonda widens her eyes and quivers sensitively. The biggest loss is to the reputation of Amrisms. GRADE: *1/2

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DRUGSTORE COWBOY (R) A startling surprise. Pacific Northwestbased filmmaker Gus Van Sant has come up with a low-budget triumph about young addicts who rob pharma-

cies to support their habits, It's a movie that flies in the face of much Bush era anti-drug rhetoric. would seem to be the film's message:

AMBROSE BIERCE (Gregory Peck) woos Hargiet Winslow (Jane Fonda) in

It's provocative, too - daring to suggest that people do drugs because drugs are fun, and because they want to relieve the pressures of everyday life (at least temporarily: self-destruction rather than relief comes later). As Bob (Matt Dillon), the leader of a gang of four robber/addicts, says to the head of a rehab program: "I like drugs. I like the whole lifestyle."

Yet in its funky, non-moralizing way, this is a very hard-hitting movie about drugs. The style is that of a deadpan black comedy, one with roots in the woozy underground flicks that Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey used to make, and with similarities to the fierce youth movie "River's Edge " Van Sant lets us share the habits of his junkies, even as those habits seem utterly depraved. The results of such a casual, lower-depths view are funny and disturbing.

adopt. When he finally decides to go straight, Bob does so knowing that it probably means the end of his relationship with his wife (Kelly Lynch). She doesn't want to give up her druginduced highs.

The controversial literary figure William Burroughs, himself a former junkie, plays a small role as an old addict/priest. With his eerie, gravelly voice and well-known unregenerate attitude about drugs. Burroughs is the right nihilistic presence to preside over this movie. He even offers what

as a means to curb other freedoms. Sounds familiar? GRADE: ★★★%

New Home Video

EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY (PG) Vestron. Which creatures are more alien - a trio of furry extra-terrestrials (Jeff Goldblum, stand-up comics Jim Carrey and Damon Wayans) or Valley Girls Geena Davis and Julie Brown?

That's the implicit question behind this giddy, junk-sci-fi musical comedy from English director Julien Temple ("Absolute Beginners"). The allens land in Davis's swimming pool, and

soon they're the toast (and bane) of Southern California.

The movie has an audacious, candycolored quality, and it's studded with MTV-style musical numbers. The always offbeat Goldblum makes a better alien than Davis does a Valley Girl, yet this off-screen couple still manages to strike some sparks together on screen. The movie runs out of steam, though. GRADE: ★★1/2

(Film grading: ** * * - excellent, *** - good, ** - fair, * -POOF)

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THE WORLD ALMANAC

DATE BOOK

Nov. 1, 1989

Today is the 305th SMTWIFS day of 1989 and the 41st day of autumn.

TODAY'S HISTORY: On this day in 1925, the first train passed through the Khyber Pass, an ancient route to the Indian subcontinent from the northwest.

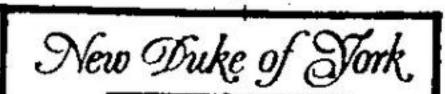
TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Stephen Crane (1871-1900), novelist; Grantland Rice (1880-1954), sportswriter; Sholem Asch (1880-1957), novelist; James Jackson Klipatrick (1920-), journalist; Gary Player (1935-), golfer; Fernando Valenzuela (1960-), baseball player.

TODAY'S QUOTE: A man said to the universe: / "Sir, I exist!" / "However," replied the universe, / "The fact has not created in me / A sense of obligation." - Stephen Crane

TODAY'S BARBS BY PHIL PASTORET

Do you suppose all three networks use the same cricket to let you know you're watching a nighttime scene set in the country?

How come the weightlifter in the family almost never is able to muster the strength to take out the trash? © 1919, NEWSPAPER ENTERPRISE ASSN.



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"Old Gringo," a movie based on the novel by Carlos Fuentes.



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predicting that the extreme right will

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