

Startling story not for faint of heart



Anne Brodie

On Movies

VERS LE SUD (HEADING SOUTH)

Starring Charlotte Rampling, Karen Young, Menoche Cesar
Directed by Laurent Cantet

The sad day in sexual cinema has come: English actor and sex icon Charlotte Rampling, who played dozens of sensual leading ladies and even a sexual sadist and a lover of chimpanzees, is now "too old to attract men."

She's over the hill, alone and paying for companionship on the beaches of Haiti in this exotic drama.

There are top-notch performances by all the key characters and Mr. Cesar's debut is especially impressive. He has a natural gift that lets us see the weariness he feels as he is pampered like a toy dog.

Heading South, set on the pre-AIDS 1970s island, takes place at a luxury beach hotel, where single women from all over the world come when they get lonely.

Ms Rampling's character, Ellen, begins her sixth summer there, between semesters as a French teacher in an Ivy League school.

She is joined by a working class Montreal woman and a woman from the southern United States there alone for the first time.

They exist in a deceptively simple world — they eat, entertain local men, lie on the beach and while away a few weeks in paradise, paying handsomely for everything.

Just beyond the tourist area lies the real, destitute Haiti, the people living under brutal and corrupt police rule.

If it weren't for their double lives as boy toys, the men on the beach would be destitute, too, so it is essential they keep their ladies happy.

One especially good-looking young man, (Mr. Cesar) called Legba, creates jealousy and territorial strategies in Ellen and Brenda (Ms Young) and their aggressive attentions have him trying to extricate himself from that life, however lucrative.

But Legba is also mixed up in a dangerous matter beyond the hotel.

His Haitian girlfriend has fallen in with a bad crowd, ruling class thugs with guns and an unexplained grudge against him.

It's a startling story, not for the faint of heart, that has all the tension of a political thriller.

It is truly set in paradise, at least as far as the tourists can see.

But then they can't hear the locals whisper behind their backs "Tourists never die"

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Karen Young (left), Charlotte Rampling and Louise Portal star in *Vers Le Sud*, a film about rich, lonely older women who vacation in Haitian resorts while desperately poor people live under corrupt police rule nearby.

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