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Brotherly Love

REVIEW BY ROLAND F. PALMER

Welcome to the world of college frat boys, parties, girls and the coming out process. John "Griff" Griffith (Chilson) finds himself in a dilemma when his late-night rendezvous with ex-housemate Pete Bradley (Handfield) turns from just fun sex to love. Griff spends

most of his time and energy in the film trying to maintain two lives: one as Pete's bedroom buddy, the other as straight frat boy. Pete, who has moved out of the fraternity house, finally demands that Griff make a commitment.

Griff decides to concede by going out on a "date" with Pete, who asks Griff to meet him at a gay coffeehouse, where they get into a bit of a tiff. Pete leaves Griff to figure

out what he wants, only to walk into a dark alley where he is severely beaten. (Perhaps luckily for all of us, this scene is not shown in great detail. In fact, many of the film's more dramatic moments are handled in less dramatic and low-key ways that help the film. Another example of this occurs in a flashback scene to when Griff and Pete first discover their desire for each other.) Griff then spends a great deal of time trying to come to a decision about his life - although one has to wonder whether he would have struggled with the issues if Pete hadn't ended up in hospital as the victim of gaybashing.

There is a good representation of collegiate characters in this film, including a very 'hunky' Todd (Lange), Griff's very understanding straight friend and housemate. I personally spent the whole film focussed on this character, hoping he would surprise us by coming out; alas, it doesn't happen. Griff also meets a female classmate struggling with coming out as well.

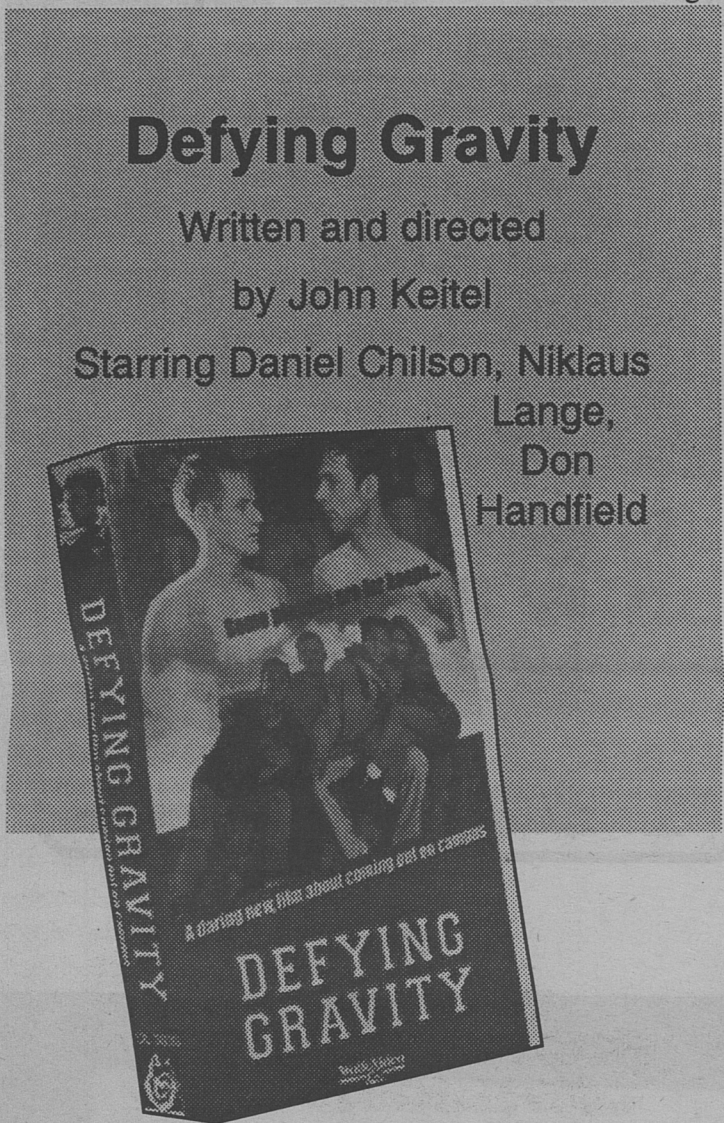
Griff comes off as too emotionally stunted for most of the film, with some brief interludes into true humanity. The roller-coaster had me wondering if the problem was in the way the character was written or the acting. The film tries to be serious

and bittersweet, which makes it rather slow in parts. The ending is no surprise, but the identification of the people responsible for putting Pete in the hospital may surprise some.

Defying Gravity is John Keitel's first feature film. He began working on the story in 1993, and after numerous drafts and a name change, he decided the only way to get the movie made was to make it himself. With the help of family and friends and a very small budget, Keitel was able to complete the principal shooting in just under two weeks. Since it was filmed mainly at the SAE fraternity

house at the University of Southern California, some real frat-boys got to be extras in the film. Keitel, who belonged to the SAE fraternity while at Stanford, has commented in various interviews that it was somewhat strange to be filming in such familiar surroundings.

Understanding that this is a first film done on a minimal budget makes you a little more forgiving; at least, it did for me. I enjoyed the film, but there was definitely potential for more. Perhaps the hardest thing to forgive is the marketing tag line for the film: "Some pledges are for keeps." Please. ▼



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