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## Review: Redford, Pitt are winners in 'Spy Game'

Fri, Nov 23, 2001 (9:16 a.m.)

Geoff Carter's movie reviews appear Fridays in the Sun and vegas.com. Reach him at geoff.carter@vegas.com.

'Spy Games'

Grade: \*\*\*

Starring: Brad Pitt, Robert Redford and Catherine McCormack.

Screenplay: Michael Frost Beckner and David Arata.

Director: Tony Scott.

Rated: R for language, some violence and brief sexuality.

Running time: 123 minutes.

Playing at: UA Green Valley Cinemas, UA Showcase 8, UA Rainbow Promenade 10, Century Orleans, Century Cinedome 12 Henderson, Rancho Santa Fe 16, Las Vegas Drive-in, Century Sam's Town, Regal Cinemas Colonnade 14, Regal Cinemas Texas Station 18, Regal Cinemas Village Square 18.

Most of "Spy Game" unfolds through flashbacks. Movies that have already happened are generally difficult to trust -- the truth can be bent into an infinite number of balloon animals before you see it for yourself. He's Keyser Soze, you are Tyler Durden, Soylent Green is People.

"Spy Game," as directed by Tony Scott, attempts nothing that grandiose. Instead we see men go back on their word -- to each other, to themselves. We touch on the American espionage community's greatest hits -- Vietnam, Beirut, China. We see that the CIA is kind of an awful place to work. And most importantly, we see Robert Redford, perhaps for the first time, playing a character that's truly past his prime.

Redford plays Nathan Muir, a retiring CIA dirty trickster who calls agents "assets" and suggests they're not always worth keeping: "Save some money to retire someplace warm," he tells a young protege, Tom Bishop (Brad Pitt). "And do not touch it. If it comes down between you and an asset, send flowers."

Yet even as we see this conversation in a flashback, Redford's axiom is already being challenged: Pitt has been taken in an attempted raid on a Chinese prison. The Agency wants to cut Pitt loose -- his plight is endangering trade talks -- and Redford, working his last day on the job, has to think fast and hard to save him.

It's Redford's finest performance in recent years. The jaded operative uses all of Redford's trademarks to his advantage -- that winning smile, his quiet burn, and the ability to invest such innocuous phrases as "Aw, c'mon, guys" with cheerful malfesance. The wheels in his head are spinning so quickly, you wonder why his trademark hair wedge doesn't have skidmarks across it. You almost pity the young, arrogant jerks who try to trip him up.

Pitt does all right in the face of such veteran skill. Pitt's Bishop (it's no accident he's named for a chess piece) is cocky, cool, and most importantly, quiet. Pitt usually has difficulty getting a handle on roles like this; his best roles to date called for him to be some sort of demented motormouth ("12 Monkeys," "Fight Club"), and when he quiets down, his expression defaults to that of a stoned surf brat. In "Spy Game," he



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finally gets it right -- the fear, amusement and pain all come across.

Michael Frost Beckner and David Arata's script leans heavily on hints and nonverbal cues, and it's a true shame that Tony Scott couldn't rein in his visual tics in deference to the story. "Spy Game," the story, is essentially an office war, fought with phone calls and appropriated files; Scott gums up the action with flash cuts, spiraling helicopter shots and an annoying freeze-frame gimmick. Imagine "Top Gun" with manila folders.

As for the flashbacks, ultimately they only describe Pitt and Redford's friendship. It's a nice conceit -- most action-suspense films of this stripe telegraph their principals' actions well in advance, so you've no doubts why anyone is doing anything. "Spy Game" plays the James Bond theme backward, and it still sounds pretty good.

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**World AIDS Day Dinner Soiree at Nove Italiano**

(4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Nove Italiano)

Free Holiday Decorating at Las Vegas Senior Center (10 A.M. TO 4 P.M.)

Football Mondays at the House of Blues (5 P.M. TO 11:59 P.M.)

"You Can't Catch Me" - Gingerbread Baby Pajama Party at The Enterprise Library (6:30 P.M. TO 8 P.M.)

Stephen Thomas at The Comedy Stop (10:30 P.M. TO 11:59 P.M.)


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