



*'Permanent Residence' would have been a much more enjoyable gay flick if the audience were spared the feeling that the film was not based on the director's life*

BY **HO YI**  
STAFF REPORTER



## 1974 all over again

BY **MICK LASALLE**  
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### Film Notes

#### THE TAKING OF PELHAM 123

**DIRECTED BY:** TONY SCOTT  
**STARRING:** DENZEL WASHINGTON (WALTER GABER), JOHN TRAVOLTA (RYDER), LUIS GUZMAN (PHIL RAMOS), VICTOR GOJCAJ (BASHKIM), JOHN TURTURRO (CAMONETTI)  
**RUNNING TIME:** 106 MINUTES  
**TAIWAN RELEASE:** TODAY

After sharing directorial credits with Lawrence Lau (劉國昌) for last year's *City Without Baseball* (無野之城), a movie about Hong Kong's only amateur baseball team that featured a fair amount of full frontal nudity, Scud (雲翔) returns with *Permanent Residence* (永久居留). The semi-autobiographical movie traces the life of its protagonist from his birth in the 1960s to his death some 80 years later and deals with homosexual awakening, unrequited love and musings on life and death.

It is an honest and affected gay drama, but the film's unbridled self-indulgence may be its undoing. Ivan (Sean Li, 李家豪) is an IT professional who works hard and has no time for dating. The young man is forced to come face-to-face with his sexuality when Josh (Jackie Chow, 周德邦) from Israel asks if he is gay during a television talk show in which the two are guest speakers and a life-long friendship begins.

After entering the gay world, Ivan meets Windson (Osman Hung, 洪智傑), who professes to be straight. A curious friendship blossoms between the two involving many episodes of nude wrestling, swimming, embracing and sharing a bed. Though apparently attracted to the free-spirited Ivan, Windson insists on limiting their relationship to nothing more than kisses and fondling.

When Windson announces he plans to wed his long-time girlfriend, Ivan is devastated and sets off on a journey of discovery that takes him from Israel to Thailand to Australia and finally back to Hong Kong.

*Permanent Residence* is flamboyantly out. With the bodies of avid gym-goers, both leads take delight in celebrating their naked, muscular flesh for the audience's viewing pleasure. They drop their towels and fly kick for no apparent reason, frolic on the beach, skinny-dip in the ocean, hold hands and share their secrets and longings in what feels like a

homoerotic utopia.

The gay never-never land is effectively contrasted with the confining world of social norms that force Windson to stay with a woman who expects wedded bliss. The familiar torments of coming out will strike a chord with many Asian audience members.

Its honest, well-intended portrait of gay/straight relationships is the film's only saving grace. Alternating between homoerotic and existential contemplations on life and death, the film is stylistically inconsistent, which shows that director Scud still has a lot to learn.

*Permanent Residence* tries to blend together too many subjects — love, relationships, identity and family — but none of them is fully explored. The movie flits from China to Japan, Israel to Thailand, to Australia, but instead of conveying philosophical undertones, the backdrops merely serve the purpose of vain embellishment and are superfluous.

The unexpected coda exudes a sci-fi, futuristic charm and provides entertainment value with its artlessness and stylistic oddity.

What is a real turn-off, however, is the unbridled narcissism acutely felt throughout the movie. Filmmakers often mine their personal experiences, but in this case the results are overbearing.

Ivan lives his childhood years in China and becomes an IT success in Hong Kong. Same with Scud. Ivan moves to Australia and returns to Hong Kong to make a baseball movie. Ditto Scud. Egocentric in the extreme, *Permanent Residence* contains many moments of self-promotion, including a scene in which Ivan's brother urges him to reproduce because he's just too talented not to pass on his genes.

Final verdict: the former IT whiz kid-turned-director may live an interesting life and have lots of stories to tell. But before Scud can make his own 8 1/2, he needs to master self-restraint.

*Permanent Residence* holds a mirror up to its director's soul.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF NAN FANG FILM



### Film Notes

#### PERMANENT RESIDENCE (永久居留)

**DIRECTED BY:** SCUD (雲翔)  
**STARRING:** SEAN LI (李家豪) AS IVAN, OSMAN HUNG (洪智傑) AS WINDSON, JACKIE CHOW (周德邦) AS JOSH  
**LANGUAGE:** IN CANTONESE, ENGLISH AND MANDARIN WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES  
**RUNNING TIME:** 116 MINUTES  
**TAIWAN RELEASE:** TODAY



John Travolta stars in *The Taking of the Pelham 123*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES

— and this new *Pelham* might have gotten some extra juice had it tapped into those. But the remake eschews the social context that made the original so compelling. Instead of a terrorist for a villain, or someone equally mysterious, the movie gives us a lone nut and his small band of thugs.

Still, despite some odd choices on the part of the filmmakers, this remake works out better than one might expect. For example, picture John Travolta playing a mentally unbalanced, emotionally erratic homicidal maniac. Then go to *The Taking of Pelham 123* and be surprised. Travolta does not go into his charming bag of tricks. He doesn't smile or laugh (or even scowl like the guy in *Pulp Fiction*.) In fact, on three occasions watching him I

had to remind myself that this was Travolta. He takes a baseline pretty-good movie and, through sheer conviction, makes it a little better than that.

So does Denzel Washington. He plays the transit officer manning the controls for that sector of the New York subway system, who's the first to make contact with the hijacker (Travolta). Washington lends the character a specifically New York type of working man's diffidence — he's a regular guy in way over his head, forced to improvise — and we watch him grow, not in confidence but in moral authority. This is strong, convincing character work.

Credit some of that to Tony Scott. He's a director known for his bombast, and rightly so, but unlike the overbearing generation of Tony Scott imitators that have taken root in the past 20 years, this director never forgets the human element.



When Kristin Scott Thomas' character, far left, is released from prison after serving 15 years for killing her child, not all her family can forgive or forget.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FILM

Juliette's strength is sustained in part by the self-belief of a survivor. This makes her sometimes disdainful of people like Lea, ignorant observers of a tragedy

they cannot understand, and sympathetic to those like her parole officer Capitaine Faure (Frederic Pierrot), whose inconsequential banter to put her at ease emerges

*Kristin Scott Thomas shines as brightly as ever in 'I've Loved You So Long'*

BY **IAN BARTHOLOMEW**  
STAFF REPORTER

*I've Loved You So Long* (Il y a Longtemps que Je T'Aime) is a small and delicately crafted drama about a woman adapting to ordinary life after spending 15 years in prison for murder. The film is anchored on a brilliant performance by Kristin Scott Thomas as Juliette Fontaine, a former doctor recently released from prison who finds a mixed reception at the home of her sister, Lea (Elsa Zylberstein).

Although Lea is somewhat bemused by the crime for which Juliette was imprisoned — the murder of her own six-year-old

son — her husband Luc (Serge Hazanavicius) is less than amused. A firm believer in the payment of one's debt to society, Luc is only barely able to overcome his distaste for the convicted murderess living under his roof. Lea, on the other hand, is deeply curious about the reasons behind her sister's actions, which influenced her own decision to adopt. Yet Juliette remains stubbornly silent, having retreated deep inside herself, and only sporadically explodes with emotion, in one case against a prying social worker. The magic of *I've Loved You So Long* is the manner in which Scott Thomas is able to provide occasional glimpses into the fiercely guarded interior of Juliette.

Thomas, a noted beauty, is best known for glamorous roles such as that of Katharine Clifton in Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1995) and Fiona in *Four*

*Weddings and a Funeral* (1994). In *I've Loved You So Long*, she casts off the silk scarves, party hats, jodhpurs and riding boots and replaces them with a much drabber wardrobe accompanied by a visage bleached of color. She nevertheless shines as brightly as ever, albeit with a different light, hinting at the great passion beneath her calm and apparently resigned exterior.

Thomas' character plays brilliantly in concert with Zylberstein's Lea, a literature teacher who desperately wants to understand or at least nurture her sister whose damaged soul has come under care. Juliette, who has clearly always fought her own battles, is disinclined to give her sister the satisfaction of playing savior and thus keeps Lea at arm's length. The relationship is prickly, though not without kindness and good intentions on both sides.

### OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

#### The Hangover

By all reliable critics' accounts this is a must-see comedy about a bunch of buddies for whom a bachelor party in Las Vegas goes seriously belly-up. Raunchy and smart, it also defies this Michael Bay era of non-existent characterization by putting genuinely interesting, funny, perverse and sympathetic characters in a world of pain (not just hangovers), starting with a missing groom, a mystery baby and a tiger in the hotel room. Features a cameo by Mike Tyson. These gentlemen, as lovable as they are, are surely fortunate they didn't star in ...



#### Teeth

There are two posters for this envelope-pushing and gory horror comedy. The more subtle one shows a teenage girl's head peering out of a bubble bath, while the other is a remarkably literal X-ray capture of this film's central conceit: the nice young woman hides dangerous dentures where men would like them the least. And they come in useful, too, as award-winning actress Jess Weixler protects her virginal self from a range of gentlemen who might just get what they deserve. This film took more than two years to get a release here, and was directed by Mitchell Lichtenstein (Roy's son), who many moons ago played the white gay lover in Ang Lee's (李安) *The Wedding Banquet*. See it with someone you'd love to be docked.



#### Blood: The Last Vampire

This is a live-action remake of the heavily touted manga from 2000, this time with French director Chris Nahon at the helm. A centuries-old semi-vampire in the guise of a Japanese girl has a score to settle with a swathe of demon-like creatures, the apparent leader of which dispatched her father. There's no shortage of bloody combat to be found, and the trailer is attractive enough, but there are rumblings out there about below-par special effects and fight sequences. In the end, it might come down to whether you prefer your carnage inflicted by a brooding, muscle-flexing male or a Japanese schoolgirl (OK, OK, so the actress is Korean). Tarantino fans will obviously go for the latter.



#### Paris 36

The trials and tribulations of a 1930s music hall in Paris is given the melodramatic effort that reminds one of *Cinema Paradiso*. Unlike that sentimental favorite, however, most reviewers did not get on side with this one, complaining of shallowness, tedium and generic elements as the music hall operators contend with ominous political developments, a lack of custom and criminal intrigue. But it's pretty, with lots of music. Original title: *Faubourg 36*.



#### Children of Glory

A 2006 Hungarian production co-written by Joe Eszterhas (*Basic Instinct*, *Showgirls*), the story moves between two infamous water polo matches between the Soviet Union and Hungary and the actions of a young freedom fighter and her water polo-playing boyfriend during the infamous Soviet crackdown that followed the Hungarian uprising of 1956. Critics were divided, calling it overbearing, affecting and sincere by turns, and Eszterhas hasn't had a screenplay filmed since. But sports fans intrigued by the politics behind sporting contests should find this fascinating, especially the brutal Melbourne Olympics climax.



#### Speeding Scandal

A box office smash in South Korea last year, this is a romantic comedy in which a has-been pop musician and radio disc jockey suddenly finds his plans for a comeback hitting the wall when a teenager shows up at his home claiming to be his daughter — with his "grandson" in tow, to boot. Initial suspicion and hostility in our professionally challenged hero gives way to something rather more heartwarming in this Baixue theater offering in Ximending. It helps that the kid is sweet — and that the media are lying in wait for any slip-up by the DJ.



## United by blood, divided by murder

### Film Notes

#### I'VE LOVED YOU SO LONG

(IL Y A LONGTEMPS QUE JE T'AIME)

**DIRECTED BY:** PHILIPPE CLAUDEL  
**STARRING:** KRISTIN SCOTT THOMAS (JULIETTE FONTAINE), ELSA ZYLBERSTEIN (LEA), SERGE HAZANAVICIUS (LUC), LAURENT GREVILL (MICHEL), FREDERIC PIERROT (CAPITAINE FAURE)  
**LANGUAGE:** IN FRENCH WITH CHINESE SUBTITLES  
**RUNNING TIME:** 117 MINUTES  
**TAIWAN RELEASE:** TODAY

As a cry for help from an inner world of loneliness and despair.

The film progresses through little revelations that follow one after the other in effortless

succession. It is peopled with wonderful minor characters such as Papy Paul (Jean-Claude Arnaud), Juliette's grandfather whose stroke-induced muteness reflects her own silence, and Monsieur Lucien (Gerard Barbonnet), an elderly rogue persistently trying his luck with the ladies at the community swimming pool. No more than spots and splashes across the canvas, these characters nevertheless enrich the film, evoking the everyday needs and common misfortunes against which Juliette's own tragedy is framed.

Although a film that is about death and the need to carry on in the absence loved ones, *I've Loved You So Long* never becomes depressing or maudlin. It is full of the small things that make life good, and its wry humor, like Juliette's slightly lopsided smile, is both charming and intriguing.