

'The Victims' pious and preachy

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The title characters in *The Victims*, a Miami-based AIDS drama, are a Cuban immigrant and his wife, lover and son. But the real victims of this low-budget production are viewers unfortunate enough to endure it.

The film isn't as garishly exploitative as its ad line — "If you don't want to catch AIDS go see *The Victims*" — but it's a pretty dismal affair, as depressingly pious and preachy as an issue-of-the-week TV movie. Even though the project's heart seems to be in the right place, almost everything else about it is wrong.

The story purports to be about how AIDS shatters the life of Paul Genesco (Roger Pretto), an enterprising man who escapes Castro's Cuba in 1967 and rapidly establishes himself as a prosperous Miami businessman. The persistent Paul woos one of the first people he meets in America, an employment counselor named Elizabeth (Sherry D'Rosa), and eventually they marry and produce a son (Jonathan Flexman, in the movie's worst case of overacting).

Trouble comes to paradise in the form of Andrea (Mary Fanaro), a slinky architect recruited to design a project for Paul's real estate development firm. Ecstatic over the success of the project, they

have an intense sexual encounter, during which Andrea transmits the AIDS virus to Paul, who then passes it on to Elizabeth.

Never mind that the incubation period for the syndrome is often many years long. Never mind that the word for catching a disease is "contracted," not "contacted." The movie is less concerned with the finer points of epidemiology than with cashing in on the fear that "one mistake, one damn mistake" can ruin an otherwise unblemished life.

For all the AIDS hoopla in its media campaign, *The Victims* doesn't even broach the subject until the movie is nearly two-thirds

over. Until then, we have to settle for a trite rehash of the story of the noble, ambitious immigrant who makes it big in the United States. The film adds nothing fresh to this familiar tale, and by dwelling on it, shortchanges the real focus of the story.

I'm all in favor of regional film production, even though it's so often an embarrassment — remember *Scooter in Palm Beach*? — so it's a pleasure to report that *The Victims* boasts above-average production values (with the glaring exception of the costume designs, which tend toward the hideous). The cinematography, in particular, is surprisingly good, and the lead actors are competent.

MOVIE REVIEW

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THE VICTIMS

CREDITS: With Roger Pretto, Sherry D'Rosa, Rex King, Mary Fanaro and Lynn Walker. Directed by Pieter van Ransseler. Screenplay by Manny Diaz. 90 minutes.

RATED R: Nudity, sexual situations, language, drugs.

NOW PLAYING: Jupiter 8 Theater, Movies at Boynton Beach, Movies at Pompano VI, Movies at River Bridge Centre, Movies at Town Center, Movies at Treasure Coast Square Mall, Regency Square 8, Sabal Palms Cinema 8, The United Artists Theatre, Ver6 Six Cinemas, Village Green Movies.