

STAG *

Starring Mario Van Peebles, Andrew McCarthy and Kevin Dillon. Directed by Gavin Wilding. Written by Evan Taylor and Pat Bermell. Produced by John Dunning and Mike Pascoernak. A CFP release. Drama. Unrated. Running time: 93 min.

Ten men come together inside a big, empty house for a bachelor party. Party favors include drugs, liquor, two strippers and their handler. After an accident kills one of the girls, the men desperately try to escape the consequences, creating a situation that's irredeemably worse. This group of very good actors led by Mario Van Peebles (and also including Ben Gazzara, Gerald Anthony and John Stockwell) creates energy, but the script by Evan Taylor and Pat Bermell focuses on character degeneration and fails to create audience interest.

Instead, "Stag" presents a tedious journey through the dull minds of uninspiring men. These gents seem contagious; one doesn't want to look at them, much less spend 93 minutes with them. The lone character with moral courage is well played by Kevin Dillon. Also noteworthy are Andrew McCarthy playing an uncharacteristically evil role, and the great Jerry Stiller (most recently of TV's "Seinfeld") as the vulnerable neighbor. A bathroom set is exciting, though the rest of the house sets are not; high-key lighting in predominantly dark frames and crawling, ominous music create a cohesive, if unpleasant, ambiance.--Karen Achenbach

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Review

'Stag' is a sad portrayal of men behaving badly

By Tom Maurstad

Staff Critic of The Dallas Morning News

Stag starts out right enough — the delectable schmaltz of Tom Jones singing *Love Me Tonight* as we watch a travelogue from the busy streets of Manhattan to the pastoral calm of a far-flung suburb.

But the song, and the commute, come to an end when a slick black sport-utility vehicle pulls up in front of a high-tech suburban mansion. Out pop two young men, who walk into the house laughing over a newspaper story about a bank vice president who found out his wife was having an affair with the manager of a burger joint and, in a case of mistaken identity, shot up a pizza parlor, killing three people.

Feel free to take that as the obviously ominous (and the ominously obvious) foreshadowing that director Gavin Wicking intends it to be. A few moments later, a living room full of rowdy celebrants reveal themselves, and the title-inspiring party commences. Victor (John Stockwell) is getting married and his nerdy best friend and business partner, Michael (Mario Van Peebles), throws him a stag party.

Stag	★½
■ Rating: not rated (violence, sex, language)	
■ Running time: 94 minutes	
■ On screen: in wide release	
Star key:	**** — Excellent ** — Fair
	*** — Good * — Poor

From the tradition of both bachelor's parties and movies about bachelor's parties, you may reasonably expect *Stag* to be a comedy about drunken men and their loutish shenanigans with strippers. And you would be half-right. It's just that *Stag* is a very serious movie about drunken men and their loutish shenanigans with strippers.

On the heels of *In the Company of Men*, *Stag* proves that plumbing the depths of men's immorality (or amorality) is a movie trend. The *Stag* party's antics take a grimy turn when one of the strippers and her escort end up dead, with her hysterical sister (pop singer Taylor Dayne) tied up in an upstairs bedroom. With (ominously) obvious *Twelve Angry Men* pretensions, *Stag* veers into pressure-cooker psychology as the guys wrestle

with the question, "What are we going to do?"

Director Gavin Wicking and writer-producer Evan Tylor hint at and toy with all sorts of narrative gambits — clean-cut groom Victor apparently has a dark past — but nothing ever comes of any of it. And anyway, you cease caring long before the end.

It says a lot about this movie that Andrew McCarthy plays the bad seed, and his performance comes off as the attempt at career rejuvenation that it is. Still, this is his best performance since *Weekend at Bernie's II*. As the vaguely haunted Dan, Kevin Dillon must work with a bad limp and even worse dialogue — "Ever kill anyone before, Taylor? Neither did I, before the Gulf."

A couple of incidental scenes do have a kind of smoldering creepiness. And there is the fun of watching *Talk Soup* host John Henson suffering through what has to be one of the most humiliating characters ever written. He plays a married but secretly gay man who gets stinking drunk and spends the rest of the movie alternately vomiting and whimpering, before throwing himself in the pool. Quite a film debut. Greg Kinnear must be tossing in his sleep.