



Judy Davis,
Geoffrey Rush,
Charlotte Rampling
and Alexandra
Schepisi (on right)
shine in *The Eye of
the Storm*.



STORM TROUPER

The grand old man of Australian cinema, FRED SCHEPISI, brings Patrick White to the screen.

IT'S NOT SURPRISING that *The Eye of the Storm* is the first film adaptation of a Patrick White novel. The Nobel Prize-winning Australian author, whose work is renowned for its complexity and idiosyncratic wit, has always been considered difficult to transpose to the big screen. But Fred Schepisi has climbed that mountain.

He's condensed the 600-page novel White released in 1973 into a sharp, elegant film about the cultural cringe and the masks people wear to keep up appearances. "One of the themes of Patrick White is that everybody's an actor," explains the director, speaking from his Melbourne office. "Everybody's presenting what they want others to see them as."

In *The Eye of the Storm*, this deception is both subtle and complex. Geoffrey Rush and Judy Davis play a brother and sister returning home to Sydney to be by the side of their dying socialite mother (Charlotte Rampling). Rush is a not-so-successful theatre actor living in London, Davis the penniless ex-wife of a French aristocrat. Despite their humble stations, both dress to impress. Rush waltzes about in cravats and blazers, Davis in threadbare Chanel. Their mother, meanwhile, shows us where they get it from, donning a series of sumptuous gowns and wigs to receive visitors in her glittering mansion.

In a key supporting role, Schepisi's daughter, Alexandra, plays a nurse drawn to Rush's voguish thespian. It's the second time Fred has directed her — the first was 31 years ago when she appeared as a child in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*.

"It was a very difficult decision to make," says the director.

"I involved a lot of other people just to make sure I wasn't being too much of a father. Basically, the unanimous decision was that I'd be mad if I didn't use her."

Further complicating the working relationship was the business of directing his daughter in a couple of sex scenes with Rush. "It wasn't as nerve-wracking as we both thought," Schepisi reports. "Alexandra and I talked about it and we decided that on the set I was a director, she was an actress and

the father-daughter relationship returned after shooting finished."

Alexandra turns in a powerhouse performance that leaves you wondering why she's not as famous as her old man. Part of the reason may be that, like him, she's uncomfortable with the dumbed-down state of the film industry. "It's just become incredibly difficult to make

intelligent films," Schepisi Snr says. "You can't do it in the studio system anymore and you can rarely do it in the mini majors."

Thankfully, Schepisi managed to raise \$15m from private backers to make *The Eye of the Storm*. He is now out shaking the bushes to finance his next film, *Words and Pictures*, starring Clive Owen and Julianne Moore.

"In the independent world you're cobbling together money. It's a risky venture," he admits. Lovers of cinema can be grateful that Schepisi, now 71, is still willing to chance his arm.

The Eye of the Storm is released on September 8.

MAN OF THE MOMENT

You might not recognise Dustin Clare with his shirt on, but the Aussie star of US TV series *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena* is soon to be seen in *The Eye of the Storm*. "I play the boyfriend of one of the main characters who leaves me for Geoffrey Rush," he says. The former *McLeod's Daughters* actor is also an ambassador for the White Ribbon Foundation: "It's something I think is really important, educating men that violence against women is not tolerated."



Leading man:
Dustin wears black
leather 'Dryden'
jacket, \$520, from
G-Star.

CRITIC



DAVID STRATTON ON HOW TO BE A FILM CRITIC

1) Don't enter the cinema with preconceptions

"It can be hard, especially if it's a sequel or remake, but you try to go in with an open mind. Reviews are always very subjective, but I try to bear in mind the audience the film is aimed at."

2) Get a wing-woman

"When Margaret and I started on TV, we looked to [American double-act] Siskel and Ebert. We went with that model but improved it by having a male-female combination, which I think makes it more interesting. Margaret and I disagree a lot less than people think and we don't manufacture disagreements for the sake of it."

3) Keep it together when interviewing your idols

"You have to play it cool but I've always found those whose work I most admire to be very decent people. Clint Eastwood, whose films I like very much, is an incredibly nice person to hang out with."

4) Be prepared to sit through crap films

"This is a wonderful job but the downside is you have to see all the films that open and most of them are not very good. American films used to be much better, but now you're lucky if you get three studio films a year that are worth seeing."

5) And get groped by fans

"I was walking up the street and a very attractive young woman pinched me on the bum and said, 'Oh, I just love you, David.' I was so startled, I didn't know how to react. That kind of thing happens when you're in the public eye."

Margaret and David: 25 Years Talking Movies is exhibited at ACMI from 17 Aug until 4 Dec. At *The Movies* 25 year anniversary episode screens 26 Oct. acmi.net.au, abc.net.au