

The Limey



United States, 1999

U.S. Release Date: 10/8/99 (limited)

Running Length: 1:30

Classification: R (Violence, profanity)

Cast: Terence Stamp, Peter Fonda, Lesley Ann Warren, Luis Guzman

Director: Steven Soderbergh

Producers: John Hardy, Scott Kramer

Screenplay: Lem Dobbs

Cinematography: Edward Lachman

Music: Cliff Martinez

U.S. Distributor: Artisan Entertainment

A Film Review by James Berardinelli

Terence Stamp is *The Limey*, and *The Limey* is Terence Stamp. Forget about everything else in this film - the supporting cast, which features Lesley Ann Warren, Luis Guzman, and Peter Fonda, Steven Soderbergh's lively direction, and even Lem Dobbs' screenplay. Without Stamp's bravura performance, there is no movie. With it, even the thinnest premise ignites the screen with white-hot passion and energy. Stamp has done some wonderful work in a long and varied career. This is not his best film, but it may be the most forceful acting he has ever accomplished.

Approximately 10 years ago, Steven Soderbergh burst onto the independent movie scene with the force of a supernova. His debut feature, *sex, lies, and videotape* almost singlehandedly put the Sundance Film Festival on the map. Overnight, Park City's winter gathering of movie-lovers was transformed from a minor event into a major seller and buyers' market. Since then, Soderbergh has done some very good pictures ([King of the Hill](#), [Out of Sight](#)), but nothing that has attracted a big box office return. *The Limey* will more than likely fall into the same category.

The movie is a visceral thriller - a stylish take on the revenge picture. Call it the art film version of *Death Wish*. There really isn't anything deeper or more meaningful going on here. However, done right, as it is here, this kind of film can be immensely entertaining and satisfying. When Stamp's Wilson finds out that his daughter, Jenny, has been killed by American drug dealers, he crosses the Atlantic and goes on a one-man killing spree, knocking off one target after another as he gets close to the bulls-eye: Jenny's lover, pop music producer Terry Valentine (Peter Fonda, playing the sleazy part with relish).

The Limey possesses several traits that allow it to work better than the average revenge thriller. The first is Stamp's performance, which blazes with intensity and energy. The actor's work here isn't just scene-stealing, it's movie-stealing. The second is Soderbergh's style, which includes flashbacks and flashforwards, with dialogue from one scene often bleeding into its successor. The third is the brilliant, snappy dialogue which often sounds scripted, but is delightful nevertheless. And the fourth is the sense of macabre, offbeat humor that suffuses the picture, reminding us not to take anything that transpires too seriously.

The film moves. It has color, energy, life, and pizzazz - all three in abundance. And, above all, it has Stamp, who, in a just world, would be guaranteed some kind of recognition at Oscar time. (Given the way the nomination process has worked in the past few years, nothing is certain.) For Soderbergh, this movie is about as far away from the low key drama of *sex, lies, and videotape* as anything he has done. If *The Limey* had been a little less well-made, I'd call it a guilty pleasure. But, because it has been crafted with a great deal of attention and care, I'll drop the "guilty" and simply call it a "pleasure."