

GIRLS, ON FILM

**COLLEGE
ISSUE**

ISSUE # 18 . NOVEMBER 2022

**back to school . real genius . st elmo's fire . revenge of the nerds
oxford blues . hell night . how I got into college . vice academy**

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Girls, on Film is an 80s movie fanzine. Digital issues are free on our website. girlsonfilmzine.com. Full-color prints available for purchase. Contact us at info@girlsonfilmzine.com.

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Real Genius (1985)

GIVING IT THE OL' COLLEGE TRY

Welcome to the 18th issue of *Girls, on Film*, the zine that's hopelessly devoted to 80s movies. For each issue, we discuss eight 80s movies related to a particular theme. To date, we have covered 144 80's films about music, sports, food, work, travel, journalism, school, robots, games, and much more. In this issue we discuss 80s college films.

CHECK THE SYLLABUS

Hell Night. Fraternity and sorority pledges party at a mansion rumored to be haunted by victims of a family massacre.

Revenge of the Nerds. Some nerds enact revenge on the football team in an effort to retain university housing.

Oxford Blues. Rob Lowe stalks a British royal under the guise of going to school at Oxford.

Real Genius. Physics prodigies discover that the project they're working on for their asshole professor has some pretty bad implications.

St. Elmo's Fire. Seven Georgetown friends test their bond while experiencing the post-graduation twists and turns of life together.

Back to School. Rodney Dangerfield is a wealthy businessman who enrolls in college as an act of solidarity when his son considers dropping out.

How I Got Into College. High school seniors endure the agony and ecstasy of applying to college.

Vice Academy. Aspiring cops hit the streets of L.A. to meet their 10-arrest quota needed to graduate the academy in Rick Sloane's sex comedy.

BEHIND THE ZINES

Girls, on Film was founded in 2017 by long-time DC-area friends Stephanie McDevitt and Janene Scelza, who were looking for a creative project. We do almost all production work in-house: planning, writing, editing, design, and marketing. We outsource full-color issue printing through a company called Blurb (blurb.com).

The zine is published quarterly. Digital issues are free on our website, girlsonfilmzine.com. Color prints are available for purchase online, at select bookstores, and at zine festivals.

Many thanks to our contributing writers, Dr. Rhonda Baughman and Matt Scelza, and guest writers Eliza David and Siobhan Hansen, for their work on this issue.

If you enjoy 80s movies and would like to guest write for the zine, please send a bio and writing sample to info@girlsonfilmzine.com.

FOUNDERS/EDITORS

Stephanie McDevitt. Stephanie's one big disappointment in life is that she wasn't old enough to fully appreciate popular clothing styles in the 1980s, as she was mostly attired in paisley sweatsuits. A full-time editor and occasional freelancer, Stephanie looks nostalgically back on '80s films such as *Ernest Goes to Camp*, *Adventures in Babysitting*, and *Can't Buy Me Love* and wishes she could pull off the hairdos of Cindy Mancini and her friends.

Janene Scelza. Janene has made loads of zines over the years. She spent her teen years combing musty video stores and public libraries for all the '80s movies she could find. She's got plenty of favorites from the decade, but it's stylish indie films like *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *Repo Man*, and *The Terminator* that she loves best.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Dr. Rhonda Baughman. Rhonda, a teacher and freelance writer, raised adolescent hell in

the '80s and the horror films of that era were her BFFs! She loves all of '80s pop culture, but nothing spoke to her quite like *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama*, *Nightmare Sisters*, and *Reform School Girls*. She had a pink laminated Video Time Video rental card at 9 years old and she never looked back. Or forward, really; she still loves her VHS and sweet, sweet VCR. And let it be known: the scrunchie never died for Rhonda: she STILL wears one proudly!

Matt Scelza. Matt loves to dissect and analyze everything. He co-writes essays for the zine with his sister, Janene. He has also logged a lot of hours at the same video stores and public library film collections with Janene in search of odd and unusual titles. However, he's got too many favorites to name.

GUEST WRITERS

Eliza David. Eliza, the novelist alter ego of librarian Kellee Forkenbrock, is a proud Gen Xer who was old enough to enjoy the 80s but young enough to not have to deal with Reaganomics. A lifelong lover of books, yoga, and all things New (as in *Edition* and *Kids On The Block*), Eliza holds *Adventures in Babysitting*, *Pretty In Pink*, and *Purple Rain* as her all-time favorite films of the 80s.

Siobhan Hansen. Siobhan (they/them) likes to spend their time watching horror movies, knitting too many projects at once, and contemplating existence. They can often be found discussing queer theory or debating why Digi-mon is a better anime than Pokemon. They get gender envy from Buckaroo Banzai and Gerard Way.

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PARTY ON, GARTH? HELL NIGHT

Dr. Rhonda Baughman

Hell is for children, Linda Blair, and apparently, 7th grade movie lovers. "I can make your life a living hell, Rhonda: and your hell's started now!" growled a 7th grade nemesis. True, I had just replied, "So they match your face," when this nemesis asked why I "bought such ugly shoes." But, was this really enough reason to bring on the living hell? Wasn't 7th grade a hellish enough landscape already? [1] During that time, I became obsessed with movies about hell. At 12 years old, I needed some outside perspective, some additional research assistance beyond the scope of my limited, pre-teen imagination.

My local VideoTime representative helped as best he could when I asked for movies about hell: *Motel Hell* (1980), *Hellraiser* (1987), and *Gates of Hell* (1980), became favorites, but when I saw the cover art for *Hell Night* (1981), I knew Linda Blair could help me understand and fight the living hell forces nemesis promised! After all, it was Blair who had taught me that the mean streets of LA might be brutal

but they're also survivable in *Savage Streets* (1984). So, why not watch her battle a night of hell to learn combat techniques for a living hell? [2]

Hell Night opens with fire, a party, screaming music, and drunken revelry, and there's something about living in the COVID era and seeing two hundred people crammed into a frat house that makes me consider another kind of hell. Blair is new pledge Marti, alongside Seth, rich-boy Jeff (Peter Barton), and party girl Denise (Suki Goodwin) who all must spend the night at the Garth Mansion. The viewer will receive local legend lore as some long-winded exposition from the Alpha Sigma Ro president Peter (Kevin Brophy). In sum, it's 12 years to the day that Raymond Garth killed his entire family, but rumors persist: one member survived and skulks about the mansion still. The modern viewer also knows with repeated use of the disparaging slang term "gork" (referring to one of the Garth brood) a whole mess of college kids are going to die.



Big chains and locks usually mean more murders.



Nothing beats a romantic night at a haunted mansion.

At any rate, after all other partyers hoot, holler, and disperse into the night, the fearless four putter about the house, bond, and trades stories. Soon though, Denise, in red hot flapper party attire, declares, "Let's party" and busts out a flask of JD from a garter belt; quaaludes from who-knows-where; and a tiny radio from her cleavage. She's pronounced "one radical chick" who "sure caught on to the American lifestyle fast." Radical Denise declares that Peter and frat bro Scott (Jimmy Sturtevant) took half an ounce of Colombian and a gram of coke from her person. I thought woah, that's a lot of drugs for one person, right? Anyway – this group is only in the mansion for six hours, and I was left thinking: isn't that a lot of drugs for just a few hours?

I doubt this is the reaction director Tom DeSimone [3] was aiming for, but I suspect he wouldn't mind me missing a few lines of mansion chitchat trying to decipher early '80s drug use; although, I almost missed a character's disjointed diatribe about capitalism! *Whew!* And without much segue before or after, Denise and Seth are off for a romp: Beach Boy's idea of seduction is to describe the perfect wave manically and lengthily. I think I know where that gram of coke really went – and I don't just mean in the script.

Despite its eccentricities, *Hell Night* remains atmospheric, spooky, and cozy, with lots of candles and roaring fires. Luckily, the characters are quite likable (but given very little in the way of clever or appealing dialogue); so, it's an easy investment in the

main four, but the same can't be said for the three merry pranksters who slip into the mansion and try to scare the four pledges. They're disposed of quickly (and in mostly bloodless ways). The film remains charming in ways movies are rarely charming anymore, including that the entirety of *Hell Night* has a lot of death but little bloodshed.

Most noteworthy of all is Blair's Marti. A lot of time is spent addressing her character: she gets the best room in the sorority house, a car, and clothes because she gives her sorority sisters English Lit notes. Marti also knows cars and works on them, so we know she's an all-around smart chick. However, intelligence and craftiness notwithstanding, Blair screams a lot: it's more like screeching, and while some may argue she earned her title of final girl, I think she's just super lucky here.

Luckily for the viewer, *Hell Night* has a few other striking elements, but the fact remains: we know who the killer(s) are from the very beginning. There are no red herrings. Secret rooms and tunnels and vents running along the outside mansion walls could have played a bigger role, and with the set so poorly lit for all night scenes, there's very little chance for viewers to orient at any point. In the film's second half, there's too much running and shrieking alongside crunching synth; inside and outside shots are obvious, but I found myself asking where are we? way too much. Also, a few trivia/goofs on IMDB are correct and obvious while watching, so if there was a script supervisor on this set, they may have



Seth escapes, but the cops aren't buying his story.



The disembodied head look was all the rage.

gotten into Denise's party favors.

Previously, I indicated the four main characters as likable, but there's little chemistry with either the sober couple (Jeff and Marti, who share a smooch) nor the giggle twins (Seth and Denise, who go at it for hours). Folks clearly watch from in between mansion walls. Could it be more frat pranks? Monsters? The Garth family? That missing script supervisor? It's tough to tell—hard to see and the dialogue unclear.

Hell Night seems to go on for a long time, but with two tense scenes of note. First, Seth's escape attempt means he must climb the wrought iron gate with the gigantic spikes at the top, daring a gruesome impalement. Second, a moment where viewers know from the camera's position that "something bad is coming." A boogeyman rises so silently, up from the floor, from behind the exhausted couple, from under a tarp. It impossible to know for sure how but boogeyman arrives where the camera tells you it will. But, both scenes are executed so terrifyingly well.

I can also forgive this strange (and probably) unintentionally funny scene: Seth escapes to the police station in town but is accused of drunken mischief. All cops are looking the other way as Seth steals a rifle, crawls out a window, and runs up the street with it before carjacking a civilian to take his car and return to rescue his buds. Unforgivable, however, is that the film slows way down at least 30 minutes before its end. Mysterious shots for night

and atmosphere, but like with the shaky cam genre, I don't need to see everything, but I do need to see something. The screaming and the running in the dark, and final 20 minutes of back and forth fighting, good guys vs. bad guys, felt interminable. During the final scuffles, one thing is clear: there's more than one boogeyman, more than one Garth with a bone to pick— and break.

A clear flash of a boogeyman face appears at the 90-minute mark. It's a creepy sort of mishmash of a mutant from *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) and Jason Voorhees unmasked in *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* (1984). The last fracas is dramatic and taut – Marti is put through the ringer. She stumbles over bodies of dead friends, she has a stubborn car to contend with, and she has a large Garth boogeyman to eradicate. Which she finally does – but the viewer is left watching the lights dim in Garth boogey's eyes and feeling strangely sorry for him.

Cliché to say now but it's almost as if the movie needed to hurry and end as dawn rose in the distance. The viewer got all the exposition they were going to get at the film's beginning, so at the end we're left to accept (and recall) it as correct: the Garth family, possibly dad and son, possibly a third, were perhaps only defending their home from privileged college kids. With that alone, I can't believe *Hell Night* wasn't a franchise. Blair's career survived. More importantly, I survived the 7th grade intact, after all, and without resorting to any tactics depicted in the film.



POCKET PROTECTORS UNITE!

REVENGE OF THE NERDS

Stephanie McDevitt

Revenge of the Nerds is a story about David overcoming Goliath. In this movie, the nerds are bullied by the oafish football team and decide to enact revenge, as the title states. However, this movie is shallow as hell, filled with racist stereotypes, and uses assault and rape as punchlines. It's not funny, and I hated it, which makes me two for two in hating my movies for this issue.

The main conflict in the movie is that the football jocks (who are all in the same fraternity) accidentally burn down their fraternity house. The football coach (John Goodman), who has a crazy amount of decision-making power at this university, tells his guys to take over the freshman dorm for housing. The freshmen who are displaced have to sleep in the gym until they find other places to live.

Our heroes, Lewis (Robert Carradine) and Gilbert (Anthony Edwards), and a bunch of other nerds are left to find a place to live when the university runs out of housing options. So, together they rent a run-down house, fix it up, and start their own little nerd utopia. However, for some reason, nerds are persona non grata at this university and the jocks and pretty sorority girls are out to destroy them. They throw bricks through their window, they put a flaming "Nerd" sign on their front lawn, and they eventually trash their house.

The nerds go to the police, who say they can't help, but the police recommend they go to the Greek Council on campus to get the fraternity in trouble. However, the jocks sit on the university Greek Council, so they



Lamda! Lamda! Lamda!



Gender swapping was a real thrill in the 80s.

ignore the nerds' complaints. So, the nerds decide to apply to fraternities all over the country so they can get on the council and discipline the jocks, but the only fraternity that will give them a chance is Lambda Lambda Lambda (Tri-Lambs), an all black fraternity. Unfortunately, the Greek Council refuses to recognize their Tri-Lamb chapter.

The nerds decide it's time to get revenge, so they pull a panty raid on the sorority girls house and install cameras to watch the girls shower because the sorority stood them up at their first fraternity party. The nerds also put some form of Icy Hot in the football player's jock straps. Everything comes to a head when the university has its Greek Games in which all the fraternities compete in a variety of events and the winner can install a member as Greek Council president. Seeing it as the only way to have their fraternity recognized on campus, the nerds know they need to win the games.

All of this was so stupid. I appreciate a good underdog story as much as anyone, but this movie really left a bad taste in my mouth. My first issue with it is that there are no classroom scenes. They're in college and they're nerds (studying "computers"), of course they're going to go to class. My second (and bigger) issue was that the pranks the nerds pulled were lazy and sexist. I mean, they're smarter than the football team, couldn't they have gotten revenge in clever ways? They built a robot that helped to clean their

house. I really feel like they could have been way smarter about their revenge.

Speaking of their lazy revenge tactics, I need to discuss two particular revenge instances. First, when the nerds do a panty raid on the sorority, the guys who are trying to steal the underwear distract the ladies while some other nerds install cameras in their house so they can watch them change and shower. They have a live feed in their living room of the girls' house and the movie shows the girls hanging out topless together. That's such a male, chauvinist fantasy (that has no basis in reality). It's gross.

Later in the movie at the Greek Games, Lewis overhears a jock's girlfriend asking for sex and the jock refuses. So, Lewis follows her into a carnival ride and, while wearing a mask, has sex with her under false pretenses. She doesn't know it's Lewis until after the fact. That is rape. There's no two ways about it. Even worse, she's not mad. She says the sex was great and she falls for Lewis.

In 2019, *GQ* did an oral history of *Revenge of the Nerds* and Director Jeff Kanew said he now sees that these scenes were wrong, "At the time, it was considered sort of a switch." He added that Betty saying Lewis was "wonderful" doesn't excuse his behavior. "In a way, it's not excusable," he said. "If it were my daughter, I probably wouldn't like it" [1]. Timothy Busfield, who plays spazzy nerd Poindexter said, "The movie would've been



He just assaulted her.

just fine without it. He could've found another way to win the girl over" [2].

Robert Carradine said, "It was never our intention to have anything but a funny scene where I get the girl" [3]. Well, it doesn't really matter what their intentions were, the final result was a rape scene. And, none of it was funny. It was creepy as hell. (Carradine apparently stayed in character for two weeks before filming started. He even tried to rush a fraternity at the University of Arizona, where the movie was filmed [4]).

Steve Zacharias, one of the writers, also admits those scenes were wrong, saying, "I regret that. I've written a play for the musical and I eliminated the rape scene. I made it that Betty was thrown off the cheerleader squad because she flunked trigonometry and Lewis teaches her trigonometry and then before the rape scene he reveals who he is and she wants to have sex with him. I also regret the video scene. It would be goofy enough if they just did a panty raid and played it really nerdy" [5]. At least these male movie makers can admit to their mistakes.

Another thing Zacharias admits to is writing the play for the musical. I did a little bit of research but I could not find any info on a *Revenge of the Nerds* musical. There have been three sequels (two of them were TV movies), a remake that was supposed to be released in 2007 but got canceled after two weeks of filming, a TV series that never



Sometimes nerds can be cool.

aired, and talk of a Seth MacFarland remake in 2020 [6]. However, since there is no info about a musical online, I'm assuming it was never produced. Why did Zacharias write the play? There must have been some interest for him to complete the work.

Revenge of the Nerds did well at the box office, making \$40 million in the US (while it only cost about \$8 million to make) [7]. The critics hated it. Lawrence Van Gelder of The New York Times said, "It is the absence of genuine comedy that exposes glaringly the film's fundamental attitude of condescension and scorn toward blacks and women, and a tendency toward stereotyping that clashes violently with its superficial message of tolerance, compassion and fair play" [8]. Despite the bad reviews, some people still seem to enjoy this movie (hence all the attempts at sequels and remakes).

Fun fact: Robert Carradine is a member of the famous Carradine family (David Carradine is his half brother and Martha Plimpton is his niece). Another fun fact is that the nerds' fraternity wasn't a real fraternity at the time the movie was made. However, in 2006 a chapter of Lambda, Lambda, Lambda popped up at The University of Connecticut. The Tri-Lambs currently have six chapters in the northeast and Washington state, and it's open to all races and orientations [9]. The idea for the fraternity came from the movie. I hope it's a good fraternity, and I hope they do not exemplify the fictional Tri-Lambs.



A TOTAL YANK

OXFORD BLUES

Stephanie McDevitt

Oxford Blues is a remake of the 1938 MGM movie *A Yank at Oxford*. Based on the plot description on Wikipedia, it seems like the original movie made way more sense than the 80s version. I absolutely hated *Oxford Blues*. I hated it so much I didn't even want to do the research to write this essay. The script is terrible and full of holes. Is it a romantic comedy? Is it a drama? Is it a sports movie? No one knows, and that's why it doesn't work on any level.

In *Oxford Blues*, Rob Lowe plays Nick Di Angelo, a Vegas valet determined to go to the University of Oxford in the UK. However, he's not at all interested in his education. Nick wants to go to Oxford so he can meet Lady Victoria Wingate (Amanada Pays), a member of the royal family who often appears in the American tabloids. Nick is so smitten with her that he has pictures of her in his locker at work. He doesn't care that she is engaged, he just knows they're meant to be together.

So, Nick pays a computer hacker (Chad Lowe in an uncredited role) to move his name up on the list to get into Oxford, sleeps with an older woman he meets at work who decides to give him a bunch of money to pay for his tuition, and leaves for Jolly Olde England to find the love of his life. As you can expect, things don't go well for Nick at first. I'm not going to go into too much detail here, but just know that the filmmakers went hard for every dumb American and stuffy English stereotype you can think of. But Nick ends up on the crew team where he meets Rona (Ally Sheedy), another American, and makes friends with the other guys on the team.

At this point it's almost like we have two separate movies happening. We have Nick's pursuit of the already-engaged Lady Victoria and we have the rowing storyline, which focuses on an upcoming race with Harvard. In the movie they reference a race with Harvard that Oxford lost, so now



Charm and looks will only get you so far in the UK.



Is my gold chain doing it for you?

they are all out to get revenge. The filmmakers even included a Rocky-esque training montage that shows Nick lifting weights and running with the team. But there is nothing that weaves these storylines together fluently, and everything just feels stilted and weird.

This movie is awful. The plot doesn't work, the acting is bad, and the stereotypes make it feel like it was made alongside the original in the 1930s. In a blog post about *Oxford Blues*, Tim Hulsizer remarks on how bad the script is, "With all due respect to writer/director Robert Boris, the fault here rests entirely on the screenplay. *Oxford Blues* is a movie that fights itself every step of the way...It never fully commits to being a romantic comedy or a coming-of-age drama, and when you're in that gray area, you really need to walk that line perfectly. Boris is no John Hughes, and the script never gels" [1].

Oxford Blues is not just a bad script; it also has totally unlikeable characters. Let's start with Nick...he's a stalker. He has creepy tabloid pictures of Lady Victoria all over, and he insists he would be better for her than her current fiance. He hacks his way into Oxford just to meet her, decides to study architecture because that's what she studies, and in his first meeting at Oxford he asks where he can find her. Then, later in the movie, he gets her schedule by lying and saying he writes for the school newspaper and he wants to interview her. None of this is OK.

And let's talk about how he gets to Oxford in the first place. In the beginning of the movie, Nick hooks up with an older woman he meets while valeting her car at a casino. They sleep together and then go gambling and they win a ton of money. He tells her his story, and she gives him all their winnings (and, oddly, the keys to her car). In *A Yank at Oxford*, the main character gets a scholarship to go to school. In this remake, Nick cheats to get in and then sleeps with a stranger who gives him money to make the trip.

Nick has no substance, but Lady Victoria seemingly falls for him anyway. Why? She doesn't even know Nick. We see them have like three conversations, and then she sleeps with him (while her family has a dinner party elsewhere in their castle). I guess he just charmed her by being the prettiest boy in all the land. But, she's an engaged member of the royal family. Would she really risk her reputation to get with some random American boy? I highly doubt it. And, it's not like she's even in a bad relationship with her fiance. He's annoying, but he seems fine and it looks like she loves him, so she has no reason to risk it all for Nick.

Lowe's acting...isn't great. But, with this script I'm not sure anyone could have put in a great performance. Hulsizer says, "Lowe has charisma spilling out of his tailored jeans pockets, but even he can't rescue a character with no redeeming qualities" [2]. Rob Lowe also wanted Princess Stephanie of Monaco



Ally Sheedy is too intense.



Julian, that guy stalked your girl.

to play Lady Victoria because he had a crush on her. The production team reached out to her, but she never replied [3]. That's kind of gross because that meant Lowe would have gotten to grope and kiss her. It's a bit of life imitating art.

Ally Sheedy is also terrible in this movie. Granted, she didn't have much to work with, but her acting is strange. She has so many weird mannerisms and she says her lines so oddly. It worked for her in *The Breakfast Club*, but in a movie like this it just looks like bad acting. She's supposed to be in love with Nick, but their friendship is not believable and, when they get together (this isn't a spoiler. It's obvious from the beginning of the movie that they will get together), it just feels wrong.

I thought the British actors did a better job with the script. Julian Sands, who played Julian (Lady Victoria's finance), and Julian Firth, who played Geordie Nevitts (Nick's roommate), were both fine in their roles. We even get to see a very young Cary Elwes in his third ever movie as Lionel, one of the guys on the crew team. Lionel hates Nick and tries to get him expelled from school. Elwes's hair is pretty great in this movie; it's really fluffy. His older brother, Cassian Elwes, was one of the producers of the movie. I wonder if that's how he got the part.

Needless to say, critics panned this movie. In his review in the New York Times, Law-

rence Van Gelder said "it is more than a little difficult to believe, in this age of the global village, that Nick could be as ignorant and insensitive toward Oxford as he is, or that Oxford would find his narcissistic brashness a novelty worthy of its vexation" [4]. *Oxford Blues* opened 8th at the box office and only made \$2.4 million in its first weekend [5].

This movie was Lowe's first starring role, and he was super disappointed in the critical reviews. According to Wikipedia, one of his colleagues said, "Rob was very hurt about the critical reaction to *Oxford Blues*, because he really thought it would work. But he's tough and realistic. He knows it was a failure, and he knows it wasn't his fault" [6]. And, frankly, it wasn't his fault. Both Lowe and Sheedy found box office success the following year with *St. Elmo's Fire* (see Eliza's essay in this issue) and Lowe went on to have a great career (once he got sober and dealt with that whole sex tape thing). So, this box office bomb didn't wreck him.

In conclusion, don't see this movie. It's not even a movie that's so bad it's good; it's just bad. Based on what I read on Wikipedia, it seems that *A Yank at Oxford* might not be as bad, so you could watch that instead. F. Scott Fitzgerald worked on that movie (although it had like 12 different writers), so maybe it will have a better script. Just don't waste your time with *Oxford Blues*.



DANGER! DEATH RAY!

REAL GENIUS

Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

Science-related teen comedies seemed to rule theaters in August of 1985. Three films—the cool kids' b-movie *My Science Project*, John Hughes's hip lowly boy virgin romance, *Weird Science*, and one of our all-time favorite 80s movies, *Real Genius*, starring a young Val Kilmer as a kind of manic pixie brainiac—debuted that month.

We hadn't discovered *Real Genius* until the mid-90s when a new cable movie network called Encore (now Starz) specializing in old and obscure titles ran it. We would watch it ad nauseam over the years. For us, it was (and still is), much like *Mary Poppins*, perfect in every way.

Produced by Brian Grazer (*Arrested Development*), written by absurdist comedy franchise veterans Neal Israel (*Police Academy*) and Pat Proft (*Naked Gun*, *Hot Shots*, *Scary Movie*), and significantly grounded by screenwriter PJ Torokvei (*SCTV*, *Back to School*) and *Valley Girl* director Martha Co-

lige, *Real Genius* has become a major cult hit over the years. "*Real Genius* contains many pleasures..." Roger Ebert observed in his 1985 review [1]. Indeed, the story, the wit, the cast, and even the soundtrack (which includes music by Tears for Fears, Comsat Angels, and Ian Dury's former sidekick, Chaz Jankel) are all good stuff.

The movie follows a handful of physics geeks at fictional Pacific Tech. (The school was a near-replica of Cal Tech right down to scrawlings on the dorm walls and legendary student pranks). Pacific's newest recruit is 15-year old Mitch Taylor (Gabe Jarret) who everyone is told to "expect great things" from. While it sounds like a lot of pressure to put on a kid, Mitch is eager for the intellectual challenge – which includes work on one professor's exclusive laser research – and to be among peers who don't stuff him into trash bins.

Things don't go quite as Mitch expects,



Mitch's bizarre introduction to the dorm.



Chris joins the 1st Annual Smart People on Ice

however. His new roommate, legendary campus brain Chris Knight (played by scene-stealing newcomer, Val Kilmer), is a smart-mouthed slacker. He discovers a strange man (the excellent Jon Gries) living in his closet. A jealous classmate (Robert Prescott) sabotages his work. Eventually, he gets severely burned out and wants to go home.

The villain of the piece (more so than jealous classmates) is Will Atherton, who maybe best known as the meddling EPA agent who caused loads of trouble for New Yorkers in *Ghostbusters*. Here, he portrays another mustache-twirling twat (sans mustache): the comically pompous professor Jerry Hathaway. He is the one who recruits Mitch and it's his laser project, funded by Department of Defense money, that the students work on while he quietly squanders the funds on home renovations (and on the most boring-looking, oddly-situated house).

Eventually, the G-Men start making house calls, demanding results from Hathaway, who in turn puts pressure on Mitch and the gang to meet his unrealistic deadlines, even threatening to expel Chris. Naturally, the geeks prevail, and with a most satisfying comeuppance involving tons of popcorn, (something tested years later in the "Car vs. Rain" *Mythbusters* episode [2]).

Real Genius was Martha Coolidge's first time directing a major studio film, though this was after she twice turned down offers

to do it, citing too many dick jokes and too much scatological humor. "What I like best about her is that she gives her characters the freedom to be themselves," wrote Roger Ebert, who considered her film, *Valley Girl*, to be "one of the best and most perceptive recent teenage movies" [3]. *Real Genius* is a movie about nerds, but they aren't standard nerds. For one thing, the geeky students of *Real Genius* exist in their own bubble. There are no asshole jocks to contend with, and save for a few hours partying with students from Wanda Trussler's School of Beauty, there aren't any hot, popular kids, either.

More importantly, the kids in *Real Genius* aren't the stereotypical sex-starved nerds with Alfalfa cowlicks and pocket protectors you saw in a lot of stupid 80s fare, most notably *Revenge of the Nerds* (see Stephanie's essay in this issue), which hit theaters the year before *Real Genius*. As Morgan Richter points out in her video essay [4], the nerds in *Revenge of the Nerds* were a fairly homogeneous tribe, whereas in *Real Genius*, there was no such blanket look or personality type, other than they were all madly smart. Chris is the cool kid. Mitch is humble. Mitch's love interest, Jordan (played by Michelle Meyrink), is adorably hyperkinetic. Jon Gries's Lazlo Hollyfeld is a happy recluse (a precursor to the *IT Crowd*'s Richmond, perhaps?). Even the aforementioned jealous student, Kenneth, and his pals aren't carbon copies of one another.

Less seems to be said about the film's role



That don't impress Jerry Hathaway much.



What's your Pop Secret secret?

in Cold War-era pop culture. The young prodigies are so engrossed in making a 500-megawatt laser fire just once that they fail to see what something so powerful could be used for. Even when the laser underperforms, it's still able to burn holes through doors. Hathaway wasn't about to let them in on the secret, either, that it is being paid for by the military to be used as a weapon. In the vein of Reagan's ridiculous Star Wars Defense initiative, military suits want to deliver a weapon capable of obliterating America's enemies (most notably, Commie Bastards), from space.

It presents a major ethical conundrum for a school. Despite all of the intense research going into the film, this part of the story was fictional. However, Coolidge reportedly received many letters over the years from people who said yeah, they unknowingly worked on weapons as a student, too [5].

Moreover, the film offers a rare defiance of traditional Cold War thinking. Compare this film to say, *Red Dawn* and some of the other Kiddie Patriot fare of the decade. The geeks in *Real Genius* are appalled, rather than elated, when Lazlo suddenly makes an observation that helps all of the light bulbs go off and they realize what they've done.

It's a timely commentary, too, as we watch Silicon Valley so often invest in potentially cool technologies that eventually wreak havoc on society. The algorithms that have taken over the Internet to perpetuate neg-

ative content immediately come to mind, as does the recent love affair with AI. We look at new inventions now with cynicism and assume that, whatever it is, it's going to somehow make life shittier, isn't it?

There is another parallel to modern times: a defiance of bullshit "Hustle Everyday" culture. Chris's transformation from Hush-Puppies-wearing-dork to, essentially, the only cool kid at Pacific Tech, was inspired by his classmate's burnout. He encourages Mitch to step away from his work once in a while, too, when Mitch wants to quit Pacific Tech. Mitch heeds this advice, and in doing so, becomes more like a regular 15-year old kid who just happens to be enrolled in college and knows a lot about physics.

Look, all of the science-related teen movies released in August 1985 are worth a watch, even *My Science Project*, which wasn't great, but makes for good midnight movie fare. But, of the three, we love *Real Genius* best. now and maybe forever.

There was talk a few years ago of a *Real Genius* TV series (surprise, surprise...) with Adam Sandler's Happy Madison company buying the rights, but thankfully nothing has come of it since [6]. With such an egregious lack of well-made teen comedies nowadays, we hope the project never finds the light of day. Meanwhile the 1985 film recently got the 4K polish, and if 80s teen comedies and 80s college movies are your jam, we highly recommend giving it a try.



WHAT ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS? ST. ELMO'S FIRE

Eliza David

There are countless 80s films about the academic lives of its trendy characters. *St. Elmo's Fire*, a mid-80s cinematic feature starring the finest of the quintessential Brat Pack thespians, begs a different question: What happens after college and why does it never turn out the way you planned? Seven friends and Georgetown University graduates manage to give us that multifaceted answer within 108 minutes.

To understand this film is to first understand the characters and their function within their friendship matrix. The movie begins with the viewers seeing the crew of pals walking out on the Georgetown lawn to a timeless instrumental ("For Just A Moment"). The scene shifts suddenly, transcending to them all meeting in a hospital emergency room. Viewers note very quickly who the hell is in charge: political yuppie-in training Alec (Judd Nelson). Alec is flanked by his college girlfriend Leslie (Ally Sheedy), his sullen writer friend Kevin (An-

drew McCarthy), Kevin's goofy roommate Kirby (Emilio Estevez), and the always late/always coked out/always fabulous Jules (Demi Moore).

You would think them alone would be enough to carry the movie, but when you meet the other two friends they've come to see in the ER – eternal frat boy rocker Billy (Rob Lowe) and the empath devoted to him, even post car crash, Wendy (Mare Winningham) – it's clear that these friends are all headed in approximately 573 different directions that will eventually lead them all to one place: growth.

Alec and Leslie, the couple of the friend group, are building a post-Ivy League life together in the heart of D.C. Alec is determined to see this union culminate into marital bliss. But alas, there's one big problem: the potential politico can't seem to keep it in his pants. Bummer. Deep down, Leslie knows Alec is a fuckboy but plays the role.



20-something living that G'town high life.

because she loves him—until he announces their engagement...before even proposing to her! Like, bruh. It's then that Leslie comes to terms with Alec's infidelity, breaks things off with him, and finds herself in bed with mutual friend Kevin.

We're getting ahead of ourselves, but this is a great time to talk about the roomies of the friend group. Kevin and Kirby are sort of the Chandler and Joey of the pack with a lot less humor. To be fair, Kevin is your typical Gen X child of divorce who writes fluff pieces for *The Washington Post* when he'd much rather be talking about the decline of human civilization. It's this attitude that makes his friends believe that love is the furthest thing from his mind—but that couldn't be further from the truth.

You see, Kevin's long held a candle for the fair Leslie, even while being the friend to which Alec admits his infidelities. This is why, when he ends up in bed with a heart-broken Leslie, Kevin feels justified. His new stance on love is quite the about-face for the character who delivers one of the most memorable lines of the movie: "Love, love, you know what love is? Love is an illusion created by lawyer types like yourself to perpetuate another illusion called marriage to create the reality of divorce and then the illusionary need for divorce lawyers."

No wonder Kevin's roomie Kirby is the comic relief this film so desperately needs. When his parade isn't being rained on by



The perpetual playboy mourns his glory days.

Kevin's incessant doldrums, Kirby is lowkey (...okay, very highkey...) stalking his college crush, Dale Biberman (Andie MacDowell). It's a shame that the film makes light of Kirby showing up in Dale's life unannounced and unwarranted on at least three separate occasions during the movie, but it was the 80s. Kirby's 'oh shucks' demeanor falls in lockstep with the personality traits of your typical incel today.

During one weird scene, Kirby goes out in the rain to interrupt Dale's date with another man. Instead of immediately waving over security, Dale asks him how he's doing. A dripping wet Kirby responds, "I'm obsessed, thank you very much." She then *checks notes* invites him back up to her apartment. I'll stop right there because we have three other friends to pick apart, but yikes on a bike!

Billy is THEE defining character of Rob Lowe's career, because there hasn't been a fictional role since that is more 80s Rob Lowe than a perpetually inebriated hot guy with wet hair and dysfunctional relationships with women. In addition to being a ne'er-do-well husband to his wife Felicia (Jenny Wright), Billy has carried on a years-long flirtation with College Friend #6, Wendy.

Billy is such an asshole that he doesn't deserve either woman, but Wendy doesn't quite see it that way. An empathic social worker with more love for the world than



The transition from college to adulthood includes pearls and a Mickey Mouse phone.



When not taking 'No' for an answer is supposed to be romantic.

for herself, Wendy is easy to love and pity simultaneously. Billy takes full advantage of Wendy's codependent love for him. In true narcissist form, Billy becomes a Petty Betty when Wendy starts dating someone else, which he finds out on the heels of a long-suffering Felicia asking him for a divorce. Sucks for him, but YAY for them!

Yes, this film is filled with men with their heads up their East Coast WASP-y asses and the women letting them get away with their shenanigans, but our final friend gives the whole crew a run for their money. Jules is what comes to mind when you think of a stereotypical 80s twentysomething: the big hair, the thousands of bangles, the fabulous clothes, the flashy pink apartment—and it's all sitting on top of a big pile of coke.

While her friends are having affairs and stalking their crushes, Jules is freefalling from addiction and trying to keep up appearances with her job. It isn't until the entire friend group is at odds that they find Jules holed up in her apartment on the brink of suicide. It's this final scene where these seven people who love each other realize how fragile life is and begin to make big changes in their lives.

It might seem like casting for this film should have been fairly easy. By the time the movie began production in 1985, the members of the Brat Pack were household names and starred in some of the biggest movies of the previous two years. The most

popular of them was high school detention classic *The Breakfast Club*, which boasts three of its cast members in *St. Elmo's Fire*.

According to co-writer Carl Kurlander, some roles required some convincing to cast. "As for Leslie's boyfriend Alec, there were questions about Judd Nelson, the rebel Bender in *Breakfast Club*, playing an ambitious young politico. Eventually, Joel was persuaded Judd was talented enough to pull it off" [1].

There was also the issue of life imitating art for Demi Moore, who portrayed Jules. "... the director of *St. Elmo's Fire*, Joel Schumacher, refused to let her star in his film unless she got sober. 'Go kill yourself on someone else's movie,' he told her. "I'm not going to let you kill yourself on mine" [2].

When it comes to the catalog of Brat Pack movies that culminated during the decade of excess, *St. Elmo's Fire* goes down as the film with the greatest character arcs. While the all white upper class characters may not have aged well over the past 35+ years, the key message remains the same: when your plans don't pan out, you still have your friends...and that's more than enough.



BEING THERE

BACK TO SCHOOL

Siobhan Hansen

On its face, *Back to School* seems like your typical raunchy, lowbrow, 80's comedy with all the expected casual political incorrectness, but at its heart lies something that we rarely see even today in movies. That is a beautiful father-son relationship built on mutual trust, love, and respect. Not exactly what you'd expect from a Rodney Dangerfield movie, huh?

The film, directed by Alan Metter (*Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*), opens on our lead character, Thornton Melon (Dangerfield), as a young kid, coming home from school to give his father his report card. He's failing his classes, which Thornton doesn't see as a big deal but his father tells him "without an education, a man is nothing." His father reminds him "You're a Meloni!"

Despite his father trying to impress upon him the importance of education, Thornton misses the mark and goes his own way,

turning the family tailoring shop into a Big and Tall-like chain of clothing stores that are worth a fortune. He changes the family name from Meloni to Melon, which at first seems like an attempt to distance from the family, but is more likely done so Thornton can make melon-sized related puns. Thornton has made it big (hah) despite his lack of education.

The first time his son Jason (Keith Gordon), a student at fictional Grand Lakes University, is mentioned, Thornton gets a call from him during a meeting. He dismisses everyone in the room so they can talk. Jason is instantly cemented as his top priority above all else. In a time when we so frequently were seeing the opposite in film - fathers choosing work over family - this explicit reversal is not only refreshing, but remarkable. The love Thornton has for Jason is obvious, but it's not so clear if it's reciprocated until Thornton arrives on campus.



Everyone's favorite 80s bully: Billy Zabka.



Business owner vs. business scholar.

Jason “mm-hm...yeah”s his way through the phone call, reassuring his father that he’s doing great on the diving team, though the viewer knows Jason is lying and that he really is just a Towel Boy. This initial lie seems like the beginnings of a “kid doesn’t know how good he’s got it” story, but we get something very different instead.

Once father and son are face-to-face, Jason can no longer hide the lies he’s been telling his dad. No, he’s not a frat member and no, he’s not on the diving team. Instead of using these lies as comedic plot points where Jason has to somehow keep up an act, Jason flat out tells his dad he lied and apologizes. Thornton tells him, “You don’t have to lie to me, I love you no matter what.” Unconditional love!! From a father!! In an 80’s movie!! Can you believe it?!

Better yet, Jason returns his father’s “I love you’s” every time. And when Jason tells his dad he’s dropping out because he can’t make it in school, Thornton echoes his own father, stressing the importance of education, telling Jason, “You’re a Melon!” (turns out the name change wasn’t distancing from family at all, as he repeats his father verbatim).

Thornton tries his best to rally Jason with a pep talk, throwing nothing but love and positive affirmations at him, but words aren’t enough. It’s clear Jason is struggling and instead of reprimanding him, Thornton

decides they’ll face this big difficult thing together. If Jason is struggling, Thornton will be there to help him.

Granted, that’s not quite what happens. Thornton’s natural showmanship and charisma (plus extreme wealth) make him well-loved on campus. He eases his way through college life by throwing cash at his problems.

Jason, meanwhile, takes a much less bold approach to college life, hanging out with his oddball pseudo-communist roommate, Derek (Robert Downey Jr.), and quietly pining over his crush, Valerie (played by Terry Farrell, who I was delighted to see as a long time *Deep Space Nine* fan). He also gets bullied by diving teammate Chas, played by the king of 80s teen movie bullies, Billy Zabka. Jason certainly takes on the introverted counterpart to his boisterous father. Yet despite this difference, Jason never seems annoyed or bothered by his father’s actions. In fact, he delights in some of his dad’s antics, quipping “did you have to take on the whole football team?” after Thornton gets in a bar fight.

It’s only how Thornton’s actions impact his schooling that troubles Jason. What at first only bothers Jason soon becomes an intense problem when Jason is led to believe he only made it on the diving team because his father bribed the coach. Even though it isn’t true, this is the proverbial straw and



A meeting of the sidekicks.



Finally got some respect.

Jason gets into a heated argument with his dad, accusing him of not actually working hard at school and merely paying his way out of everything. Jason wants to learn and grow and earn his education, which he sees his dad as getting in the way of. Though his dad being here was meant to help, it is actually hurting.

After this clash, the two go their separate ways, and the following morning Lou (Burt Young), Thornton's chauffeur/bodyguard/right hand man, talks it out with Jason, reminding him that his dad was there for him when he was struggling with school. Even though they may disagree, they have to look out for each other.

What's interesting and refreshing about this arc is that it stems from a genuine misunderstanding of principles and is reconciled by a mutual respect and communication. For a college comedy, it's pretty damn nuanced! Jason and Thornton love each other so much, and their fight is purely from a frustration with not being able to communicate effectively.

By the end of the film, the already close duo are closer than ever. Jason helps Thornton study for his finals and avoid expulsion, Thornton boosts Jason's confidence which lands him a spot on the diving team and the affection of the girl he loves. When Jason's rival attempts to insult him by saying he'll end up just like his dad, Jason replies "I

hope to God I do".

This film showcases a fully realized father/son relationship at multiple stages and faced with different challenges. And I love how it resolves conflict between these two. Even with the people you love most, there will be times you disagree or even fight. Instead of harboring resentment or anger, Thornton and Jason talk out their points of view and love each other more for it.

Back to School is a classic comedy full of incredible cameos – who thought they'd see Kurt Vonnegut in this? (and he would later tell the *Indianapolis Monthly* that the role "earned me more respect from my drug-gist and my dry cleaner here in New York than anything I'd ever done [1]" – hilarious one-liners, and a top tier performance from Rodney Dangerfield. The movie received mostly positive reviews from critics when it was released in the summer of 1986. Audiences seemed to love it even more; *Back to School* became the second most popular film of 1986, just behind *Crocodile Dundee*. What really makes it stand out for me is the genuine love emanating from the main characters and how their relationship shines throughout.



THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY HOW I GOT INTO COLLEGE

Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

We have already sung the praises of screenwriter/director Savage Steve Holland back in our second issue when Janene wrote about his excellent feature film debut, *Better Off Dead*. Stephanie covered the follow-up, *One Crazy Summer* in our third issue. And our fingers were long kept crossed that we'd be able to track down his third film (written by Terrel Seltzer), *How I Got Into College*, by the time we got to this issue, since physical copies are hard to come by and our VHS rescue from the early 2000s Video Store Apocalypse hasn't fared too well. So, thank you anonymous Eastern European bootleggers for making this essay possible.

Savage Steve Holland's great contribution to 1980s cinema was absurdist teenage rom coms *ala* Zucker/Abraham (*Airplane*) humor.

We've seen it before in John Hughes's *Sixteen Candles* (1984) and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), where delightfully weird teenagers navigate their delightfully weird worlds, poking fun at the craziness of modern adolescence. Though, Holland's films are, for the most part, far more innocent (don't get us started on Farmer Ted's escapades with a catatonic cheerleader).

How I Got Into College plays up the agony and ecstasy of going to college. We follow several college-bound high school students over the course of their senior year as they apply for schools. *WaPo* film critic Richard Harrington praised the film, saying: "Hollywood's track record when it comes to dealing with teen-agers is dismal. It knows how to kill them, but hardly ever worries about



Marlon aims to please.



Go for a college interview, stay for an existential crisis.

sending them to college" [1].

To be fair... Hollywood hasn't ignored college life, even in the 1980s. We found plenty of movies to pick from for this issue. But, Hollywood hasn't taken the institution too seriously, either. The post-*Animal House* (1976) college movies largely concern underachieving party animals, sexually-frustrated nerds, and meddling deans. Thankfully, this film bucks tradition.

How I Got Into College also wasn't the first movie about sending the kids to college. The source of all of Joel Goodson's anxiety in *Risky Business* (1983) was the expectation that he get into a good school and pursue a lucrative field. And, in *All the Right Moves* (1983), college was a way to avoid the sad fate of becoming a Steel Town Girl (or Boy) on a Saturday Night in wee Johnstown, PA.

What is unique about *How I Got Into College*, however, is that the process of applying to school takes center stage: taking the SATs, deciding on a school, the life-long obsession with college resumes, familiar pressures, financing (Michigan State was \$2 motherfucking grand a year?!), recruitment efforts, applications and interviews, and of course, the all-important response from the school. It all plays out in a sweet, silly romantic comedy.

The film opens with something like the running gag of Lane Meyer's therapeutic doo-

dles in *Better Off Dead*. Here, it's confusing SAT math questions come to life. Person A and Person B grow increasingly frustrated with our main character, Marlon Bruneau's inability to answer a question. He's a nice kid, but his SAT scores suck, and his academic record is unremarkable, and he's about to graduate high school.

His pseudo-anti-capitalist buddy, Oliver (Christopher Rydell), thinks they should hitchhike across America, convinced it would offer a more meaningful education than more school, but Marlon is set on going to college. However, he breaks the cardinal rule of applying: don't pursue a school for purely romantic reasons. He wants to go to whatever school Jessica Kailo (Lara Flynn Boyle), the girl he has for years pined for from afar, plans to apply. And Jessica, who is smart and very active in her school and knows what she wants to do (save Italian frescoes) wants to go to Ramsey College.

Even more interesting is that we see how all of this plays out in the admissions office. The Dean of Ramsey College admissions, played by the late, great Phillip Baker Hall, announces that he will be leaving the school and is looking for a successor. Vying for the job are a Ramsey alum (Anthony Edwards) who envisions a school that looks beyond the numbers to give opportunities to kids with potential even if they don't have the test scores, and an insufferable ass-kisser (Charles Rocket) who thinks the school



Big plans for the future of Ramsey College.



Tichina Arnold is waiting with antici... pation!

should cater to the filthy rich and potentially filthy rich,. It's an early foray into the post-Reagan cynicism we'd see in the early 90s.

Marlon and Jessica both struggle to stand out in their college applications. Marlon is the most endearing, least deserving hero in the movie. He doesn't really do anything too impressive except rescue damsel in distress Jessica after a horrendous interview and make a video essay asking the admissions people to pretty please with cherries on top take a chance on him.

Jessica is far more interesting. She begins her senior year cool and confident, but she damn near has a mental breakdown during her Ramsey interview when she suspects that she, girl of many activities and experiences, has nothing unique to offer. It's a nice little commentary about the race to start packing the college resume from birth and then having to compete even more ferociously with loads of other equally accomplished applicants. The interview goes so comically bad that Jessica gives up her dream of going to Ramsey and prepares to settle for the University of Michigan (her family's alma mater) and a lifetime of U Mich swag. Luckily, Marlon helps her get back on track.

We also get invested in the fate of a few background characters, like Jessica's super stressed-out friends, a football recruit who's never permitted to speak for himself,

the son of a wealthy asshole, and a working class student (Tichina Arnold's scenes in a McDonald's uniform look suspiciously like clips from a corporate recruiting video). The film also has a terrific supporting cast, including Brian Doyle Murray, Phil Hartman, Tom Kenny, and Richard Jenkins (in his usual dad role). You'll also find a *Better Off Dead* veterans Curtis Armstrong, Diane Franklin, and Taylor Negrón.

How I Got Into College was, not surprisingly, a commercial flop, and it has since become all but non-existent on anyone's radar. The marketing didn't really accurately capture the tone. It seems ideal for fans of *Summer School* (1986), where most of the students are endearing underdogs, and you pretty much root for all of them. *How I Got Into College* even includes *Summer School* alum Richard Horvitz (Alan Eakian) and Duane Davis (Jerome Watkins) among its cast.

It's a nice little film that may work best as a silly primer for young college applicants or soon-to-be applicants. Dated as it might be, there is a lot about the film that is still relatable. Sadly, affordable physical copies of the movie are in short supply. If you come up short in your search, we know some Eastern Europeans who can hook you up.



**FIVE SEQUELS SPAWNED OF BABES,
FLUFF AND (VAGUELY) SEXY STUFF**

VICE ACADEMY

Dr. Rhonda Baughman

Graduation is a few weeks away and all students of director Rick Sloane's *Vice Academy* (1989) must make at least 10 arrests for a position on the force! Students must also choose their undercover assignments, and since it's '89, our film's four stars are already dressed as if they're undercover for *Vice* squad work (save for Ken Abraham as Dwayne [1], the only male in the class). The remaining pupils in Miss Devonshire's (Jayne Hamil) class are dressed to fade into the background—even IMDB credits them merely as "Academy Girl" [2].

More importantly, whatever comedy categories used to label *Vice Academy* (silly, goofy, slapstick, skit, cringe, character, one-liners, innuendos, prop, *et al.*), might fail to mention that, by today's standards, most scenes feel like harmless, tame hijinks and shenanigans. And as it turns out, *Vice* contains a lot

of naughty hijinks and shenanigans I *clearly missed* as a pre-teen: the number of jokes I failed to grasp as a kid are hilarious to note now. However, it was the effervescent Linnea Quigley (Didi), flawlessly curvaceous Karen Russell (Shawnee), adorably dorky Dwayne, and the lovably naughty Ginger Lynn Allen (Holly) who held limitless appeal for my younger self—not the comedy itself, proved by the recent rewatch—which brought with it two lovely, long-buried memories.

Once my well-loved VHS copy [3] of *Vice Academy* was dusted off and popped into my VCR, these two recollections returned: 1. Eleven-year-old Rhonda marching to the counter at VideoTime (RIP, my beloved video store), pink laminated card in one hand and the rental ticket in the other, heart pounding with excitement and 2. Eleven-year-old Rhonda making sure her 99 cents (+tax!)



Speedy makeup application is an important part of the job.



Baby's first sting operation.

went far: renting on a Friday meant keeping the movie until Monday, which meant watching *Vice Academy* half a dozen times. Every time young Rhonda watched the neon pink credits zip back and forth while a male singer belted out a tune about pistols in pockets, fingers on triggers and well, other gun-related euphemisms, she made up her own lyrics, danced around, and sang along.

No dancing during the most recent viewing of the opening credits, but I did smile and hum along (even now, I still have no idea what's really being sung during the opening credits [4].) But sadly, my enthusiasm this time around was dimmed somewhat—certainly not by the four still beloved stars, but by some dated jokes, painful pacing, and multiple comedic notes that fell flat in our ethnically-inclusive and #metoo era. Instead, I found most fun by keeping track of the wisecracks, drug-oriented and sexual in nature that flew way past my younger self. Included, but not limited to:

1. Linnea's fake name used on an application to get her foot in the door of a casting agency, so as to bust a porno ring? Didi Fluffer.
2. Holly's [5] line "I'm lookin' to party" is obviously, code for "where the coke at?" but I thought she just wanted to dance. I mean, she does dance around in *Vice's* opening scene!
3. An S&M joke and faux film listed on Didi's resume (as she tries to infiltrate a porno ring)? "Beat Me in St. Louis."

4. Before Didi's 'adult performance,' she says she has to "run a few lines" but when the casting agent recounts Didi's whereabouts to the female director, Desiree [6], he says she had to "go into the next room and do a few lines."
5. "This is the last time I spend a quarter to see one of your films!" a hooker shouts to porn star stud Chucky Long (Stephen Steward), Didi's love-at-first-sight beau since their scene together.

Those are just a few—I made it to double digits. *Double digits*. At the very least, I understood the running gag of Karen Russell exposing her breasts at various moments. Or I thought I did. Except, of course, I assumed the joke was only that her breasts were amply distracting instead of the fact her top-dropping was wildly inappropriate and supposed to be super funny. Oops.

Busy taking notes of my missed opportunities, I also paid close attention to the plot, which seemed to make so much sense as a kid, but now? Much more difficult to follow. Graduation coming? Check. Undercover assignments? Check. Didi, Dwayne, Holly, and Shawnee are all seeking a place on the local police force, specifically on the *Vice* squad? Triple check. Oh! That's right! Holly's dad is also the Chief of Police (Cliff Corder). Oh! That's right! While strutting down Hollywood Boulevard, Didi and Shawnee run into Cherry Pop (billed here as Christian Barr, aka Allison Barron), a young porn star, beaten and kicked out of the biz due to her age [7].



Queen Bee runs Bartertown.



Totally legit police academy graduation garb.

Oh! That's right! Once they discover Chery Pop, Didi and Shawnee [8] get serious about their law enforcement careers, and with Dwayne at their sides take to the LA streets to make arrests, make a difference, and make it to graduation. Oh, that's right! Didi, Dwayne, and Shawnee stumble onto the Queen Bee's (Jeannie Carol) operation: a notorious madam who's already sold several undercover rookies into white slavery and castrated a few more. Dwayne and Shawnee are kidnapped, and Didi gets Chucky's help to save her pals from the Queen Bee's stinger! After she instructs him how to uncuff himself from a pipe beneath her sink, of course [9].

So, mostly, there's a lot of random events that do try hard to form an uneven plot, and some film critics may love to write snooty comments like "interruptive narrative flow" or (my least favorite line indicating lack of cohesion) "made up of a bunch of skits strung together."

Although some critics might be able to say those things about *Vice*, I think part of the film's charm are choppy transitions and amateurish editing. Extra charm [10] for the sound effects that are often out of sync with the action on screen. For example, when cadets are at the obstacle course shooting line, they're aiming at a target with a major highway/moving cars behind it, and though the cast is in a big open field, bullets ricochet half a dozen times, but where/off of what, is unclear.

And yes, *Vice* wheezes along in spots, and often remains on characters' final expression for too long before wandering into the next scene. Most noticeably, the camera loves to linger on Linnea's expressions as she's exuberantly camping her way through her faux porn film, legs in the air, but "undercover."

Vice Academy is like the friend you made in elementary school, that while you're both out of college now, the two of you have nothing in common anymore but the love for one another remains. Of course, I'll always have that kind of special love in my heart, but 1989 was a long time ago. There are several jokes that are horribly unfunny, the least offensive now of which is a long classroom makeup joke, full of gender-bias, and while possibly hilarious 30 years ago, feels terribly dated now.

Furthermore, as the joke continues into a timed makeup tutorial from Ms. Devonshire demonstrating on Shawnee, then Shawnee demonstrating on Didi, I was reminded vividly of the fact that this film had a small but vital part to play as to why I don't wear much makeup. However, unlike a fair amount of comedy now, none of the humor in *Vice Academy* feels nasty or malicious, and it's certainly not raunchy by current norms, and that alone is enough to make that old (but still special) love in my heart for this film bloom again.



Oxford Blues (1984)

ENDNOTES

PARTY ON, GARTH? HELL NIGHT

Release Date: August 28, 1981
Written by: Randy Feldman
Directed by: Tom DiSimone
Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] To note: I've spent decades studying bullying and you can find my name associated alongside 'bullying' online quite a bit – although my most important collaboration thus far is with A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master star Andras Jones. Our work together is "RDD2", an anti-bullying initiative for college campuses.

[2] It made perfect sense at the time AND based on the music in Savage Streets, I thought I might get a cool soundtrack, too!

[3] Also directed Reform School Girls (1986)

POCKET PROTECTORS UNITE! REVENGE OF THE NERDS

Release Date: July 20, 1984
Written by: Steve Zacharias and Jeff Buhai

(screenplay), Tim Metcalfe, Miguel Tejada-Flores, Steve Zacharias and Jeff Buhai (story)
Directed by: Jeff Kanew
Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] Knopper, Steve. "The Oral History of Revenge of the Nerds." GQ. 26 July 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8dtfmp>

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Revenge of the Nerds. Wikipedia. <https://tinyurl.com/54juebhx>

[6] Ibid.

[7] Lawrence Van Gelder. "Campus Nerds." The New York Times. 20 July 1984. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8p9e7v>

[8] Revenge of the Nerds. Wikipedia. <https://tinyurl.com/54juebhx>

A TOTAL YANK: OXFORD BLUES

Release Date: August 24, 1984
Written by: Robert Boris
Directed by: Robert Boris
Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] Hulsizer, Tim. "Forgotten Film: Oxford Blues (1984)." Blogsizer. 9 October 2015. <https://tinyurl.com/4ea8keh3/>

[2] Ibid.

[3] Oxford Blues. Wikipedia. <https://tinyurl.com/mr3zs628>

[4] Van Gelder, Lawrence. "Film: Oxford Blues Opens." The New York Times. 25 August 1984. <https://tinyurl.com/3x3kfp2h>

[5] Oxford Blues. Wikipedia. <https://tinyurl.com/mr3zs628>

[6] Ibid.

DANGER! DEATH RAY! REAL GENIUS

Release Date: August 9, 1985
Written by: PJ Torokvei, Neal Israel, and Pat Proft
Directed by: Martha Coolidge
Essay by: Janene and Matt Scelza

[1] "Real Genius" (Roger Ebert, 1985) <https://tinyurl.com/4674jc2z>

[2] Busted: "You can use a plane-mounted 5 megawatt laser to cook popcorn, and when using enough popcorn, it can expand with enough strength to break open a house. (Based on a scene from the movie Real Genius.)" (MythBusters Results, 2009) <https://tinyurl.com/2cdzkew5>

[3] "Real Genius" (Roger Ebert, 1985) <https://tinyurl.com/4674jc2z>

[4] "When Gen-X Ruled the Multiplex, Episode 18: Real Genius" (Morgan Richter, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/p5rw6kpy>

[5] "Interview with Martha Coolidge, Director of 'Real Genius', 'Valley Girl', and More" (Rediscover the 80s, 2019)

<https://tinyurl.com/32kkc2wr>

[6] "Adam Sandler on a Quest to Ruin "Real Genius" (Tucson Weekly, 2014) <https://tinyurl.com/59375ufx>

WHAT ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS? ST. ELMO'S FIRE

Release Date: June 28, 1985
Written by: Joel Schumacher and Carl Kurlander
Directed by: Joel Schumacher
Essay by: Eliza David

[1] "St. Elmo's Fire Turns 35" (Deadline, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/yuwp2ddp>

[2] "Demi Moore Opens Up About Her Cringeworthy Performance in 'St. Elmo's Fire'" (Showbiz Cheat Sheet, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/2s4bwb6a>

BEING THERE: BACK TO SCHOOL

Release date: June 13, 1986
Written by: (Screenplay) Steven Kampmann, Will Porter, PJ Torokvei, and Harold Ramis (Story) Rodney Dangerfield, Greg Fields, and Dennis Snee
Directed by: Alan Metter
Essay by: Siobhan Hansen

[1] b"15 Educational Facts About Back to School" (Mental Floss, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/5cm3tdz5>

THE AGONY AND THE ESCSTASY: HOW I GOT INTO COLLEGE

Release date: May 19, 1989
Directed by: Savage Steve Holland
Written by: Terrel Seltzer
Essay by: Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

[1] "How I Got Into College" (Washington Post, 1989) <https://tinyurl.com/65zt3f72>

FIVE SEQUELS SPAWNED OF BABES, FLUFF AND (VAGUELY) SEXY STUFF: VICE ACADEMY

Release Date: 1989
Written by: Rick Sloane

Directed by: Rick Sloane
Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] I interviewed Abraham a decade ago – one of the more difficult interviews of my career, but I was grateful he responded. I've always liked his acting, even the brief appearance on the TV series "Angel".

[2] I dimly recall loving the film's fashion but most of it doesn't pop for me as it once did. Nostalgia kicked in at the 23 minutes mark for Linnea Quigley's audition outfit; at the 35 minutes mark for empowered female director Desiree's (Viper) scarf and jumpsuit; at the 41 minutes mark when Quigley's red pumps flash across the screen; and at the 46 minutes mark – Quigley's b/w leopard print dress. But now? It's all about the Queen Bee's phenomenal outfit: black skintight plunge number with gold capped areolas, smol red stinger, a prop jar of honey, and huge beehive hairdo.

[3] Streaming on Tubi but I had to rewatch the "right way".

[4] I can make out a few more lines, but just a few – and barely. The song may or may not be titled "Pistol Whip" by Marky DeSade, aka Mark Richardson (also billed in the credits as the "Casting Agent")

[5] Meeting the real Ginger Lynn at Cinema Wasteland in the late '00s-early '10s saw all thoughts of her bitchy Vice persona eliminated – she was warm and funny and genuine and beautiful.

[6] Billed as Stephanie Bishop, aka Stephanie Green, this actress is aka Viper, the notorious adult film actress from '86-'94. Her IMDB bio is way too short – and I find myself wishing she were still alive to tell her tale. She passed away from lung cancer in 2010.

[7] Although this age 'joke' is mentioned at least twice and comes full circle at film's end, I just didn't get it. She's under 18? She's over 18? She's 19? I have no idea, but she's happy by the end because her workout video goes "platinum".

[8] Karen Russell has little obvious on-

line presence and disappears from the biz around '03. Her IMDB has shown some activity in the last few years. Rumor has it she owns/operates Yoga Groove in North Hollywood. Contact info for the business is listed for a Karen Budge, so maybe next time I'm in North Hollywood, I'll stop in.

[9] The Linnea Quigley faux sex scene was a staple of my childhood – many movies contain her vigorously loud and exuberant comedic sex moans – this isn't just Vice Academy. There's Assault of the Party Nerds (1989) and Return of the Living Dead (1985), less comedically loud, because demon in Night of the Demons (1988) and let's just say it was a schtick throughout two decades.

[10] Three charms I notice now, as an adult: 1. the ridiculous "whore's purse" scene – a clutch for undercover vice agents containing technology non-existent then: a lipstick that opens to simulate gunfire; a perfume spritz that opens to simulate police sirens, and hammy earrings that are a radio and receiver; 2. new respect for the goofy, faux poster artwork in the casting agent's office – Nightmare of the Lost Whores and Night of the Loving Dead; 3. The gravelly-voiced Tinsel (aka Tami Bakke, aka Tamara Clatterbuck)

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