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GIRLS, ON FILM

12

NEWS

HOPELESSLY DEVOTED TO 80'S MOVIES

IN THIS ISSUE: BROADCAST NEWS | WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM | ABSENCE OF MALICE
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girls. on film

THE NEWS ISSUE

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hot off the presses

Welcome to the 12th issue of *Girls, on Film*, the fanzine that is hopelessly devoted to 80s movies! For each issue, we discuss a selection of 80s movies related to a particular theme. We write about all kinds of movies. We have covered 80s films about music, sports, summer, food, work, role-reversals, entertainers, animation, robots, road trips, and films adapted from other works (in that order).

In this issue, we take a closer look at the following 80s movies about journalism and the news.

Where the Buffalo Roam (1980) This is a sentence. This is a sentence. This is a sentence. This is a sentence.

Continental Divide (1981) A journalist and ornithologist (and interview subject) fall in love—but neither wants to give up their career.

Absence of Malice (1981) A sloppy crime reporter creates serious trouble for an innocent man.

Fletch (1985) Chevy Chase is an undercover investigative reporter trying to uncover a drug ring.

Perfect (1985) A *Rolling Stone Magazine* writer hits the gym to research the newest singles clubs.

Salvador (1986) Photojournalist Richard Boyle's search for freelance gigs lands him in Hell.

Broadcast News (1987) Holly Hunter tries to uphold journalism standards while getting involved in a love triangle in the newsroom.

Switching Channels (1988) An unsuccessful *Broadcast News* knockoff with a leading cast that hated each other.

behind the zines

STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

Co-Founder & Co-Editor

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 SCENZA

Co-Founder & Co-Editor

Janene has written a buttload 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. There were lists! 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.

DR. RHONDA BAUGHMAN

Regular Contributor

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 SCENZA

Guest Writer

Matt loves to dissect and analyze everything. He is stoked to join his sister, Janene, for two essays in this issue. He 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.

JESSICA MACLEISH

Guest Writer

Jessica MacLeish is a Veronica, not a Heather. She's also a writer, editor, and late 80s baby who loves watching, thinking about, talking about, and writing about movies.

All digital issues of *Girls, on Film* are available, for free, at girlsonfilmzine.com. We publish quarterly. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, or subscribe to our newsletter for notifications about new issues. For prints, trades, guest submissions, and collaborations, contact Stephanie and Janene at info@girlsonfilmzine.com.



IS THIS REAL LIFE OR IS IT FANTASY?

where the buffalo roam

BY DR. RHONDA BAUGHMAN

“Who is the happier man? He who has braved the storm of life and lived or he who has stayed securely on shore and merely existed?”

- Hunter S. Thompson

There’s only one Dr. Hunter S. Thompson; frankly, I doubt the collective (un)conscious(ness) could have handled another. But I should tell you: the man may be gone but there’s still some HST atoms in the air [1] and his most well-known witticisms still strike like a backhand. That is, you can see it

coming but it still stings. Additionally, to suggest I (and many others) have modeled our own writing/journalism careers after Thompson wouldn’t be a stretch; it’s not unusual to admit Thompson remains an enormous influence no matter the career stage. People probably experienced Thompson himself very much like I experienced Bill Murray as Thompson in the film *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1980), as a volcanic combo of shadow elements: fear, disbelief, curiosity, disdain, and wicked glee. Suffice it to say, I like those darker components: I

MOVIE DETAILS: RELEASED APRIL 25, 1980 | WRITTEN BY HUNTER S. THOMPSON (STORIES) AND JOHN KAYE (SCREENPLAY) | DIRECTED BY ART LINSON



HITCHING A RIDE ON THE MESCALINE EXPRESS.



COURTROOM COVERAGE FOR BLAST MAGAZINE.

also like professional and weird – and I am always filled with the aforementioned wicked glee when I read one of Thompson’s most infamous quotes: “When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.”

Buffalo is the predecessor to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), and its tagline sells it as based on the “twisted legend” of Thompson himself, highlighting some of his personal odyssey, and allowing Murray to embody the very soul of weird. Murray revels within the mess that brought us Thompson’s gonzo movement – and he delivers a hectic caricature of the man who knew well how to hold and sow some serious chaos. Facts and fictions often blurred for Thompson and they get a little fuzzy for the viewer, too.

The film itself (and Thompson’s overall career) reflect an era that weighs on me like a phantom while the narrative itself unravels in vignettes that even now, 40+ years later, constitute a visual onslaught and total humdinger of a plot. Researching the film’s time periods, I found the real stories to be just strange as *Buffalo* which is more of an experience, more of a proxy adventure than it is a demonstration of ordered storytelling.

The film’s construction hiccups on as both vaguely cohesive (a flashback to a 1968 SFO drug trial) and mostly linear (welcome to 1972 – a Superbowl Sunday and the Nixon Campaign trail), and remains frenetic throughout until the heavy, decidedly non-comedic denouement worthy of literary analysis itself. The weave-through, corkscrewing shots of present day, show Thompson at home in

his Colorado ranch compound, and in full tilt gonzo journalist mode seemingly for only his dog and a Nixon dummy. It feels as if Murray, like Thompson, possessed the foresight that someone was always watching even if you’d never find out about it, so it’s best to be on all the time.

Also always watching and needing to be in top fighting form in *Buffalo* is Thompson’s beleaguered editor who remained as steadfast as patience, stamina, and budget allowed (Bruno Kirby portrayed the fictional Marty Lewis, seemingly an amalgamation of Thompson’s real life editors Alan Rinzler and Jann Wenner).

Thompson’s relationships with both were strained by the end of his career and for myriad reasons, not all of them on Thompson. Rinzler, at 83 years old, spoke candidly in 2020 on his time with Thompson until his suicide in 2005 [2] and how Thompson may have handled the current political circus. Thompson’s editors, like any of those around him, were often swept up in his maelstrom or left bewildered and shivering in his wake, but deadlines needed hit when careers and large sums of money were on the line. Everyone from Thompson’s editorial comrades to passers-by and hangers-on were left with lots of feelings and stories to tell: probably Thompson knew it, too.

Speaking of story, within *Buffalo*’s structure, the cast, writers, and crew manage to cradle remarkably relevant insight on crimes and punishments, political discord and dissension, but the film still doesn’t really take the time to address those topics



LECTURING NIXON SCREWHEADS AND THE DOOMED.

in any meaningful way, comedic or otherwise. Instead, we get antics reminiscent of scrapped early SNL skits and some of the worst scene transitions committed to film. Yet, two lines manage to stand out from the melee of mumbled and madcap dialogue: 1) “There’s some shit goin’ down somewhere.” (from a pimp adjacent minor character) and 2) Murray’s bathroom rant to Nixon about “the doomed”. The former makes me chuckle a bit, while the latter stings in its Death of a Salesman vibes and late stage capitalism viewing.

Apparently, Thompson only appreciated Murray’s unique performance in *Buffalo* and not the film overall. I’d like to think that perhaps Thompson could appreciate the fact that the essence of his zany life, full of passion and intrigue, escapades and lunacy was committed to film at all. Alongside Murray, Peter Boyle valiantly played Thompson’s lawyer chum, Carl Lazlo, Esq., and is based on Thompson’s real life pal Oscar “Zeta” Acosta Fierro who mysteriously disappeared in 1974 – technically, not long after the vignette scene nearing the film’s end, where Murray’s Thompson decided against joining Boyle’s Acosta on a plane for a crazy scheme dream. This same scene features blowing papers, among dialogue and expressions more depressing-as-hell than darkly comedic. Thompson later wrote in 1977 an article about Acosta, “The Banshee Screams for Buffalo Meat,” alluding to his disappearance and alongside Acosta’s 1972 book *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, these pieces gave birth to the title *Where the Buffalo Roam*.

Finally, like any famously weird artist and icon, I



LAZLO PITCHES ONE LAST CRAZY SCHEME DREAM.

suspect the real Thompson often bled and splintered into his persona Thompson – and it may have been impossible to tell where one ended and the other began.

Whether *Buffalo*, *Fear* or 2011’s *The Rum Diary*, kernels of spirit, nubs of HST matter were captured. But there’s no doubt the writer Thompson produced full, significant creations and although not often palatable, his readers (myself among them) voraciously dined on his life’s words and loved him anyway; it’s one reason of many we still excitedly cover his compositions and legacy today.

There’s a touch of melancholic nostalgia to all of Thompson’s works now and those about him. We know how his story and the stories he created end, after all. But everything ends, so, that’s not quite the right way to look at his art (and I suspect HST wouldn’t stand for it either). He bought the ticket, took the ride – disembarking when and how he wished – he’d expect no less from those who continue to bask in his life’s prose and study films based on his life. In 1998, Hari Kunzru wrote, “the true voice of Thompson is revealed to be that of American moralist ... one who often makes himself ugly to expose the ugliness he sees around him.”

So, as writers, as artists, as readers, and as fastidious, devoted lovers of our various and complex media perhaps we should rejoice, celebrate the ugly and our “dangerously weird times” and continue to forge paths of individual pandemonium and truth if we want something prettier; it’s certainly the least we can do.



ONLY THE SUN-TIMES HAS SOUCHAK

continental divide

BY JESSICA MACLEISH

Continental Divide is many things in one hour-and-forty-five-minute-long movie: it's a movie about journalism, it's a visually appealing exploration of nature and the importance of natural preservation, and it is, at its core, a romantic comedy. (If your first thought is, wow, John Belushi as a rom-com lead?, you aren't alone—*Var* magazine also thought he was “an unexpected choice” in 1980 [1]). It's also the first film to be credited as produced by 80s movie king Steven Spielberg's production company, Amblin Entertainment [2].

The movie made an estimated \$7 million at the box office against a budget of \$9 million, leading the *Village Voice* to call it a “flop” in a December 1981 issue, though Blair Brown—who was cast after

Jill Clayburgh fell through, and following delays thanks to the 1980 Screen Actors Guild strike [3]—received a Golden Globe nomination for her role as Dr. Nell Porter [4], starring opposite John Belushi as Ernie Souchak. It certainly had its floppy moments for me, and the plot, though simultaneously predictable and winding, crested to an ending I didn't expect—a surprising depiction of modern love, at that.

The movie gives Belushi a chance to flex his comedic charm, and Brown is incredibly likable as the fiercely independent “highly respected scientist” and “eagle freak” Nell. The scenery also deserves credit as a character—not only are Chicago's cityscape and The Rockies' open-air wilderness paramount to the mov-

**MOVIE DETAILS: RELEASED SEPTEMBER 18, 1981 | WRITTEN BY LAWRENCE KASDAN
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL APTED**



SOUCHAK'S EDITOR PRESCRIBES A VACATION.

ie's plot, they're a treat for the eyes while watching.

The movie opens and quickly establishes Souchak's (he is mostly referred to by his last name in the movie, so I'll do the same here) journalist bona fides. He's a widely respected, jovial, and hard-working city columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and is in the midst of exposing a corrupt alderman named Yablonowitz when we meet him, with a little help from a carefully cultivated source. So far, so good; Souchak seems legit, journalist-wise. He's admirably trying to expose corruption! Things get a little too hot—as in, he's beat up by two police officers on the alderman's payroll—and his managing editor (Allen Garfield) suggests he take some time off, not just from work, but from the whole city of Chicago.

Souchak ships off to the Rockies in the Wyoming wilderness (actually filmed in Colorado [5]), to let things cool off, but also to try score an interview with Dr. Nell Porter, a reclusive scientist who lives in a remote cabin and has devoted her life to studying the endangered American bald eagle. Now, remember I said this was a rom-com as its core? So you can guess what happens next.

Nell isn't too pleased to see Souchak—who, importantly and sneakily, does not divulge that he's a reporter for, uh, a little too long—but, since his guide has already disappeared and isn't supposed to fetch him for another two weeks, she agrees to let him stay until then. Hijinks ensue, including some moments that were generally accepted to be funny in the 80s that are definitely not so in 2021 (really, they never



GETTING AN EXCLUSIVE WITH THE RECLUSIVE.

were, but the majority of society has caught up by now); moments such as Ernie peeping on Nell while she's in the shower, generally objectifying her (and in his official notes for the profile he's supposed to be writing, no less!), or acting like an entitled man-baby when his repeated sexual advances (reminder: he is supposed to be profiling Nell; so much for those journalist bona fides) are rejected.

Souchak may be a lauded columnist in Chicago (inspired by real-life columnist Mike Royko [6]) but his grasp of ethics seems lacking, which was off-putting. I knew the movie was a rom-com, and yet, because of Souchak's early behavior, I wasn't so jazzed about the love connection I knew was coming. That said, people—and fictional characters—can change, and *Continental Divide* clearly thinks so, too.

Eventually, what we get is a classic “opposites attract” love story, as Souchak comes to admire and understand Nell's work and her passion for it, and she starts to care for him, too (even after learning that he's a reporter). They spend lots of time outdoors together, something the actors actually trained for with mountain climbing technical advisors [7]. Their love affair is cut short, however, because, well, they live incredibly different lives. Souchak has to return to Chicago, and Nell is committed to her work in the Rockies.

And this is where things get interesting. Nell and Souchak reunite in Chicago when she visits for a conference, and reaffirm their love for one another. After a blissful few days, Souchak ends up riding



THE STAR REPORTER RETURNS HOME, DISTRACTED.

the train all the way back to Wyoming with her—but rather than one of them giving up the careers they're so passionate about for love, or giving up their love to continue with their respective work, they spontaneously get married at the train station general store before Souchak boards the next train home to Chicago and Nell continues on to her cabin. "I'll see you when the snow melts!" Nell promises. "I'll be waiting," Souchak replies. That's some modern love right there.

This isn't a movie that positions itself as tackling the age old "can women have it all?" question, and yet, it does offer up an answer—for both sexes. Nell doesn't have to choose between love and career. Neither does Souchak. They choose both, and it works for them. Color me refreshed. Does this sweet ending redeem Souchak's ickier earlier behavior and muddied journalistic ethics? Does it need to? Both things can exist at once, and in a movie from 1981, I might expect one but not necessarily the other.

On the journalism front, *Continental Divide* offers some great journalistic montages and fist-pumping press takedowns of corrupt politicians; it's almost an idealized representation of journalism on screen. There's an interview montage! Lots of typing! Late night investigations! Snuffed sources! Published article screenshots! Souchak is so beloved and respected and on fire as a journalist that the Chicago Sun-Times sends an airplane out to fly over Chicago displaying a banner that reads "ONLY THE SUN-TIMES HAS SOUCHAK." Re-



A THOROUGHLY MODERN MARRIAGE PROPOSAL.

ally, all you could hope for from a screen portrayal of the journalism business, accurate or not (and as I'm not a newspaper reporter, I can't say).

On the other hand, Souchak seems to flout lots of journalism ethics from almost the moment he meets Nell, including promising not to write the story he came to write and then secretly writing it anyway, and the ol' "reporter falls for a source" schtick strikes me as a little tired. To that end, this movie ends up offering up evidence that women can't escape unwelcome sexual advances from men no matter how remote their lives are.

Some of the movie's best lines also stem from its journalism subject matter, in the form of a few epic burns from Nell to Souchak when they first meet and he reveals that he's there to write a story about her. "Reporters are parasites who feed off the accomplishments of other people," she says. "I don't see newspapers much, but what I do see sickens me," she tells him. Do I agree? No, but that doesn't mean I didn't chuckle at her barbed wit.

Shocking no one, Belushi is funny, too, and there were a few genuine laugh-out-loud moments throughout *Continental Divide*. When the end music swells and Souchak and Nell run toward each other on the train tracks, he shouts, "run faster, I'm walking this last bit!" Reader, I laughed. And I was happy to see these two make a go of it in the end. So while *Continental Divide* won't necessarily be jumping onto my "favorite movies" list anytime soon, it's not without its bright spots.



TRUTH IS IRRELEVANT

absence of malice

BY JANENE SCELZA & MATT SCELZA

Director Sydney Pollack's romantic legal drama *Absence of Malice* was (still is?) a standard part of the American journalism curriculum as a study of ethics and constitutional law [1]. Like some of the other films covered in this issue — *Perfect* (1985), *Salvador* (1986) and, to an extent, *Switching Channels* (1988) [2] — *Absence of Malice* is the product of an industry insider. Former executive editor of the *Detroit Free Press*, Kurt Luedtke, penned the script with frequent Pollack collaborator, David Rayfiel. (It was the first of three screenplays Luedtke would write, and all of the films were directed by Sydney Pollack [3]).

Absence of Malice, starring America's Cinematic

Sweetheart Sally Field and Ol' Blue Eyes Paul Newman, opened in theaters in 1981, just five years after the Woodward & Bernstein opus *All the President's Men* got the kiddies jonesing for journalism careers. While both films involve newspaper reporters, they present contrasting views of the press.

Lucida Franks, of the *Columbia Journalism Review* wrote: "In a few short years, we went from being 'nattering nabobs of negativism' to Truth's fearless warriors, who, with a stroke of the pen felled all the president's men, including the author of the alliterative epithet. Now, in less than a decade, we are down with the dogs again" [4]. (Paul Newman saw hailed the movie as a jab at the *New York Post* [5]).

**MOVIE DETAILS: RELEASED SEPTEMBER 18, 1981 | WRITTEN BY LAWRENCE KASDAN
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL APTED**



PRIME. PRIMER. PRIMEST SUSPECT.

Absence of Malice is set in a surprisingly mild-mannered Miami. An FBI taskforce is investigating the disappearance of longshoreman union president, Joey Diaz. Leading the investigation is overzealous FBI agent, Elliot Rosen, played by Bob Balaban of *Seinfeld* fame. Elliot suspects that Michael Gallagher (Newman), a liquor wholesaler who has family ties to the mob, might have information about the union leader's whereabouts. But, without any leads, the feds can't touch Michael. However, it doesn't stop Elliot from trying.

Elliot's plan is to get Michael to come to the FBI by leaking a bullshit story about Michael's role in the investigation to unsuspecting *Miami Standard* reporter Megan Carter (Field). She's suspicious, but fails to do much to verify the information before knocking out her front page story. Her editor sexes up the language. And the paper's lawyer gives his blessings. By morning, the headline says Michael is a key suspect in the Diaz case.

Of course, that's news to Michael, a (presumably) innocent man. (Kurt Luedtke based Paul Newman's character on (not-innocent) Detroit mobster, Jack Tocco, who gained a reputation for suing media entities that referred to him as a mobster [6]). True or not, the information is out there, and it causes serious trouble for Michael.

Michael shows up at Megan's office demanding to know where she got her information and wondering why they made such a half-assed effort to reach



IF THE BOAT'S ROCKIN' THE G-MEN ARE KNOCKIN'

out to him for his side of the story (they made one call and he didn't answer). Megan is mum on the source, and her editor defends the article on the grounds that they did their (bare minimum) due diligence to ensure the story's accuracy.

Megan, her editor, and even their lawyer seem too disconnected from reality to appreciate the harm caused by the story, anyways. Readers are going to assume Michael is guilty. The union board certainly does and blacklists his business. Worst of all is what happens to his close friend and alibi, Teresa (Melinda Dillon, aka Ralphie's mom in *A Christmas Story*).

Teresa explains to Megan that Michael couldn't have had anything to do with Joey Diaz's disappearance because he was accompanying her to an abortion out of state when the union leader went missing. Megan wants to share that in a new article to clear Michael's name. Teresa begs her not to mention the abortion out of fear of being ostracized, but Megan ignores her, telling her it's 1981 and the world is a more understanding place. (That's a ridiculous assumption to make even now, 40 years later). It drives Teresa to suicide. And yet, Michael seemingly has no official recourse.

The film's title, *Absence of Malice*, refers to the legal test in defamation and libel cases involving public figures, as established by the US Supreme Court in the 1964 case *NY Times v. Sullivan* [7]. Basically, there is no liability for bad information printed in

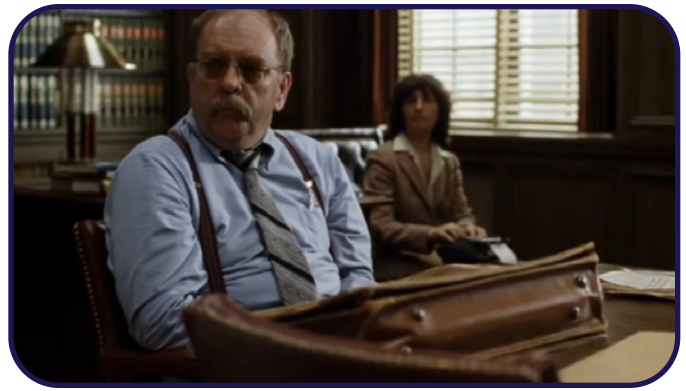


TERESA ATTEMPTS TO CLEAR MICHAEL'S NAME.

good faith (or absent malice). Says the paper's lawyer to Megan: "I'm telling you, Madame, that as a matter of law, the truth of your story is irrelevant. We have no knowledge that the story is false, therefore we're absent malice. We've been both reasonable and prudent, therefore we're not negligent. We may say whatever we like to say about Mr. Gallagher, and he is powerless to do us harm. Democracy is served."

The *New York Times* wrote about journalists' reaction to the film ahead of release in 1981. Improperities in the field were nothing new. "What they doubt is that any self-respecting paper would long tolerate, much less encourage, the kind of naivete of the reporter or the deliberate sensation-seeking of her editor" [8]. Kurt Luedtke said the movie wasn't meant to be indicative of the entire institution -- that there are good and bad reporters -- so don't hate [9]. Nonetheless, cynicism towards the domestic American press seemed to be trending in the 1980s (not that it was a very big category of films. In contrast, films about foreign correspondents were often heroic tragedies.

For the film's director, the journalistic and legal matters in the film were the intellectual "armature" and was secondary to the romance. "Even if it's a thriller or a comedy, it's always a love story for me," Sydney Pollack once said. "And that's what I concentrate on, because the love stories are my surrogates for the argument: two people in conflict that see life differently" [10].



YOU GOT A HELL OF A PUBLICITY PROBLEM.

Indeed, ticking off one more journalism no-no, Megan and Michael get romantically involved. He is the grounded hero of the film, while she is young and ambitious, but woefully naive. America's Cinematic Sweetheart doesn't get much love in the film — Megan just does too many outrageous things — but momentarily, she gets to step out of the role, and it softens her a little.

"The fact is, this movie is really about a woman's spunk and a common man's sneaky revenge," wrote Roger Ebert [11]. In a jarring confrontation between Michael and Megan after Teresa's death, Megan gives up her source. Michael spends the remainder of the film quietly plotting convoluted revenge on the FBI agent, a complicit DA, and Megan & Co. at the newspaper. (There were too many shitty people working against *The Little Guy*). The finale is a diplomatic equivalent of the atonement scene from *Network*. Wilford Brimley, warm as a bowl of Quaker Oats, shows up in a much celebrated cameo as the Mother Hen of the Justice Department summoned to wave a stern finger at the misbehaven.

Absence of Malice received generally positive reviews. Even with the revenge plot, this is not a movie rife with dramatic gotchas. It's an entertaining slow burn ("pensive," to use Janet Maslin's description [12]) with a stellar cast. Paul Newman, Melinda Dillon and screenwriters Kurt Luedtke and David Rayfiel all received Oscar nods. We recommend checking it out.



I FEEL LIKE A HUNDRED DOLLARS

fletch

BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

Before Chevy Chase was the racist, old man we know today, before he was in razzie-nominated movies, and before he was a failed talk show host, Chevy Chase was a big star. After a run on *SNL* to start his career, Chase starred in several very successful movies. In 1985, with *Caddyshack* and *National Lampoon's Vacation* under his belt, Chase made *Fletch*, a movie about an investigative reporter who's trying to expose a drug ring.

Irwin Fletcher, AKA Fletch, (Chevy Chase) is an undercover reporter for the Los Angeles Times. At the start of the movie, he's wandering the beaches disguised as an addict trying to break a story about

drug trafficking. One day, Fletch is approached by Boyd Aviation exec Alan Stanwyk (Tim Matheson). Stanwyk tells Fletch that he's dying of cancer and doesn't want to live through the disease. He can't kill himself because his life insurance policy won't pay out if he commits suicide. So, Stanwyk, who assumes Fletch is a junkie, offers Fletch \$50K to murder him.

Fletch agrees to the plan, but he's obviously skeptical and starts investigating Stanwyk. He pretty quickly discovers that Stanwyk does not have cancer. So, why does Stanwyk want Fletch to murder him? He puts his drug investigation aside to fig-

MOVIE DETAILS: RELEASED MAY 31, 1985 | WRITTEN BY ANDREW BERGMAN (SCREENPLAY) GREGORY MCDONALD (NOVEL) | DIRECTED BY MICHAEL RITCHE



YOUNG GINA DAVIS IS UNDERUSED IN THIS MOVIE.

ure out what's going on and meets with Stanwyk's co-workers, parents, and business partners. What Fletch uncovers is a nefarious plot involving polygamy, corrupt cops, and, of course, drug running.

Fletch also spends a good amount of time talking up Stanwyk's wife, Gail (Dana Wheeler-Nicholson). He poses as a friend of Alan's and says he met Gail at her wedding. Despite having no recollection of meeting him, Gail seems to trust Fletch and later lets him into her cabana at the beach club while she's wearing only a towel. Fletch eventually comes clean to Gail about what he's up to, and with very little fanfare, she believes him.

Back at the paper, Fletch's boss (Richard Libertini) is ready to fire him for missing his deadlines on the drug piece. Fletch keeps working the Stanwyk angle, convinced it will lead to something bigger. He conducts his interviews wearing various disguises, and ends up in some pretty hairy situations, occasionally risking his life, but Fletch is determined to get to the bottom of this. And, like most movies, he just might get the pretty (and very young) girl along the way.

Fletch the movie is based on Gregory McDonald's novel of the same name. Published in 1974, *Fletch* the novel won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for best first novel from the Mystery Writers of American Association [1]. McDonald went on to write 11



FLETCH WINES AND DINES WITH STANWYK'S WIFE.

Fletch novels (and a bunch of other books), but this was the only Fletch book made into a movie.

Fletch the movie took a while to get off the ground. After acquiring the rights in 1976, producer Jonathan Burrows pitched it to over 20 different studios, and Universal eventually signed on (after initially rejecting it). Andrew Bergman wrote the script in four weeks. McDonald did not like the script, so Director Michael Ritchie invited him to dinner and, according to McDonald, "Point by point, he showed me where I was wrong. I was beautifully chewed out" [2].

When McDonald sold the rights to the movie, he retained the right to veto casting decisions. A host of actors were considered for the role, including Jeff Bridges, Charles Grodin, Barry Bostwick, and George Segal. Two casting options McDonald shot down were Mick Jagger and Burt Reynolds. McDonald was happy with Chase. In an interview with EW he said of Chase, "I sent him a telegram saying, 'I am delighted to abdicate the role of Fletch to you'" [3].

At the time Chase filmed *Fletch*, he was caught up in drug addiction. In an interview with The AV Club, Tim Matheson talked about working with Chase: "Chevy had been a bad boy with a drug problem and had never really realized his potential. *Fletch* was the first movie he sort of straightened up on."



FLETCH GETS A LESSON IN POLICE CORRUPTION.

Matheson said the studio thought that Director Michael Ritchie was the guy who could keep Chevy in check [4] (Chevy Chase eventually entered rehab in 1986 [5]).

Matheson also said Ritchie would shoot one take that stuck to the script and then would do another take and let Chase adlib. He said, “He’d shoot the movie the way he wanted it, then do one take for Chevy. When I worked with Chevy, he’d say, ‘Just ad lib and try to break me up. Just insult me. Anything.’ When we were doing his close-up, or when my back was to the camera, I would come up with jokes or quips or anything, to get a real reaction out of him” [6].

Chevy Chase said he enjoyed playing Fletch because he could improvise. According to Wikipedia, he said, “I love props, like wigs and buck-teeth and glasses. At one point I wear an Afro and play basketball with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. There were some scenes where I didn’t recognize myself.” Chase later went on to say that Fletch was his favorite of all his films [7].

Chase had good reason to like this movie. It was a hit. It made \$59 million on an \$8 million budget [8]. For the most part, the critics liked it, it has a 77% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, and it became a cult favorite. I’ll also admit that I liked *Fletch*. I didn’t think I would because I generally don’t enjoy



STANWYK’S WIFE CATCHES HIM WITH GUN IN HAND.

Chevy Chase, but he was good in this movie. He wasn’t over the top or too reliant on schtick, and overall I think he gave a good performance.

Fletch was followed by the 1989 sequel *Fletch Lives*, which is not based on one of McDonald’s books. Talk of a *Fletch* reboot began in the 90s and continues today. Originally, Kevin Smith wanted to do a reboot with Jason Lee as Fletch. Smith was going to make *Fletch Won*, a prequel, but well-known rapist Harvey Weinstein refused to move forward with Lee being cast in the role [9].

Smith was eventually replaced by *Scrubs* writer/director Bill Lawrence, who wanted to make a Fletch movie with Zack Braff. This trend continued over the years with different directors and actors. In July 2020, Miramax announced the project was back in action with John Hamm as both the producer and the star. This movie is supposed to be based on the second Fletch book, *Confess, Fletch* [10].

I’ll be interested to see if the new *Fletch* movie happens, but after all this time I’m not sure how they’d do at the box office. If you want to read the original version of the story, all of the Fletch books are in print and for sale on Amazon. And, like I said earlier, I was pleasantly surprised when I liked this movie, so I recommend checking it out.



GET OUT OF MY GYM AND INTO MY CAR

perfect

BY JANENE SCELZA & MATT SCELZA

In 1983, *Perfect* screenwriter Aaron Latham wrote an article for *Rolling Stone Magazine* about how gyms had replaced bars and discotheques as the place for singles to mingle. It sounds silly, nowadays considering how working out at the gyms has become a largely solitary experience; you throw on your headphones, work out, and get on with your day [1]. But, as one gym-goer quoted in a *Salon* article recalled, “You met people. You dated people. It felt more like a nightclub. There was a lot of endorphins kicking off, a lot of wildness in the first couple years. Were women at my beck and call? Yes -- I taught aerobics!” [2] (So... the sexy tennis instructor wasn't just an 80s movie trope?!)

Perfect serves as the ridiculous, fictional backstory to Latham's "Looking for Mr. Goodbody" article. (Author's note: Janene hated this movie; Matt did not). Like *Absence of Malice*, *Perfect* looks at how people's private lives are affected by what is made public in the press. However, the culprit here is a gossipy fluff piece.

Latham (his name is Adam Lambert in the film) pitches the story to his editor, Mark, as an opportunity for the New York elites to laugh at hardbodied California health nuts. For his research, he selects the Sports Connection, a real-life fitness center in L.A. that bills itself as more than a club, “it's a

**MOVIE DETAILS: RELEASED JUNE 7, 1985 | WRITTEN BY JAMES BRIDGES AND AARON LATHAM
DIRECTED BY JAMES BRIDGES**



ADAM DOESN'T TAKE 'NO' FOR AN ANSWER.

lifestyle.” (The real Sports Connection's reputation survived both Latham's article and the movie [2]).

The film was directed by James Bridges, who hit it big in the 1970s with *The China Syndrome* and *The Paper Chase*. John Travolta takes the lead as Latham/Lambert. The pair had previously worked with Aaron Latham on the 1980 country bar drama, *Urban Cowboy*. “I had developed this theory that if I can figure out what the ‘New Saturday Night’ is and write about it, then people would be interested,” Latham told Slash Film. “*Urban Cowboy* was that and the singles health club was that, too” [3].

While *Urban Cowboy* was fairly well-received, *Perfect* became one of those seminal box office bombs. Critics panned the movie when it opened in the summer of 1985, and audiences haven't been too keen on it since [4]. The film was nominated for several Razzies (Worst Actor (Travolta), Worst Supporting Actress (Marilu Henner), and Worst Screenplay) as well as a Stinkers Bad Movie Award for Worst Picture. *Perfect* was also one movie in a string of flops for Travolta, who's career pretty much fizzled until *Look Who's Talking* in 1989.

Honestly, *Perfect* is incredibly dopey, but the movie isn't *that* bad. To the film's credit, and much like *Absence of Malice*, viewers get a (presumably) authentic glimpse into the inner-workings of the



FOLLOW ME, I'M THE PIED PIPER!

press, and more generally, the life of a journalist. “*Rolling Stone Magazine* lent its name, its layouts, its Fifth Avenue office (an exact duplicate of which was built on a Hollywood back lot) and its editor-publisher, Jann Wenner...” [5]. However, what makes *Perfect* so imperfect is that it's packaged as a quintessentially 80's super-sexy aerobics movie with workout scenes that go on for way too long. (We suspect these scenes inspired Matt Berry's wiener-flopping workout in *The IT Crowd*). Plus, the story is all over the place, mostly wavering between dull romance and messy commentary on ethics.

Adam arrives in L.A. and tours the Sports Connection prepared to laugh at the clientele. But, thanks to the awesome sexual powers of the club, he has a change of heart when he meets their most popular Slimnastics instructor (Jamie Lee Curtis, slumming it). He immediately invites her to lunch and spouts a bunch of bullshit about the role of the modern gym in Emersonian America in the hopes that she'll do an interview for the article.

Adam and Jessie eventually hook up, but she makes it crystal clear (several damn times!!) that she's not interested in doing an interview because she had been burned by a reporter in the past and doesn't trust them. Jessie explains that before working as a Slimnastics instructor, she was a competitive swimmer. She was planning to compete with Team USA at the 1980 Olympics, but this was the year that



FINDING LUKEWARM LOVE AT THE SEXY GYM.

President Carter boycotted the games. A reporter took an interest in Jessie's story, but instead the article focused on an alleged affair with her swim coach. It derailed her career and his marriage.

None of this fazes dickhead Adam, who cruelly assures his editor that "she doesn't want to cooperate, but she will." And his dickhead editor, Mark, gleefully respond: "When you sit down to write, pretend she doesn't have a mother." Ugh... in the words of Jennifer DiNuccio: "Gross me out the door!" Of course, *something* has to drive a wedge between these two lukewarm lovers!

And yet, we're also supposed to believe that Adam is a Man of Journalistic Integrity. ("Let's get eth-i-cal! Eth-i-cal! I wanna get ethical! Let me hear your body talk!") At the beginning of the movie, Adam is covering a story about a CEO named John McKenzie who claims to have been set up by the feds in a drug arrest. (In reality, the CEO was failed automaker and time machine inspiration, John DeLorean, who was arrested for cocaine trafficking in 1982 [6]).

Adam gets an exclusive interview with McKenzie. Afterwards, Mark and the magazine's lawyers ask for the tapes, but Adam refuses because he promised the CEO that no one else would get access. His decision could land him in jail if he's subpoenaed in the case. It's an interesting dilemma, but the only



MAN OF JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY, OR WHATEVER.

point of this subplot seems to be to neatly wrap up the predictable lover's squabble.

Jessie eventually (and literally) kicks Adam's ass to the curb when she catches him recording one of their conversations during a weekend ski trip. (Apparently he can respect the wishes of a CEO, but not the woman happily sleeping with him). Determined to finish the article and get back to New York, Adam tags along with a group of the Sports Connection's horniest clientele. This part is especially uncomfortable to watch nowadays, considering how the AIDS epidemic had everyone thinking twice about "scaring up a gangbang" by the end of the decade.

We don't know what kind of article Adam ultimately winds up writing about the Sports Connection. However, while on assignment in Morocco he gets a copy of the magazine and discovers that his editor and other staffers made some outrageous rewrites making him Public Enemy Number One at the Sports Connection. Luckily, a trip to central booking because of the aforementioned tapes changes the angry L.A. mob's mind, even Jessie's [7]. They all live happily ever after, thrusting their pelvises into the sunset. *And exhale...*

Perfect is the kind of dumb, cheesy 80's fare that's perfect for a watch party. It's a hard one to track down, but there are a few bootlegs floating around.



INTO THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

salvador

BY DR. RHONDA BAUGHMAN

Will you lead on Loving Avenue or blindly follow along Hateful Drive? You have a choice: just ask which serves your path more.

There is the dualistic belief – if you're not the predator, you're the prey – and this abridging of a complex idea can further muddy already murky waters. The faulty dilemma fallacy (aka black/white thinking, aka either/or thinking) is not only a cause for trouble, but an answer to it as well. Such was my thought process for enduring the brutal rape/mass murder scene in *Salvador* (1986) (of nuns and humanitarian aid workers). I had to ask myself: if I can feel empathy and compassion for the victims, can I at least attempt to extend these same emo-

tions towards the vicious humans who perpetrated the violent acts?

It's not simple, certainly not easy, and many would ask why I'd even bother, but this question is the beginning to unraveling what compels, drives humans to such behavior (in some cases, generation after generation). Perhaps once we can find it in us to locate this shred of love, a shred of compassion, can we then locate some understanding of the root causes of violence so as to find ways to snuff it out before its most extreme manifestations. Or we can stick to the usual: console ourselves with a fairy tale, dehumanize the perpetrators and say only monsters could do such evil things (how's that

**MOVIE DETAILS: RELEASED APRIL 23, 1986 | WRITTEN BY OLIVER STONE AND RICHARD BOYLE
DIRECTED BY OLIVER STONE**



HIGHWAY TO THE DANGER ZONE.

working for us so far?) thus conveniently ignoring an obvious truth: they're not monsters. No, they're very much human, just like us.

So are journalists Richard Boyle and Hunter S. Thompson – very human and overwhelmingly obnoxious in their incarnations and personas that exhausted me as a viewer (I can't imagine what it felt like to befriend them!). I'm not the first journalist to draw immediate parallels to Boyle's Academy Award-nominated *Salvador* and the early Hunter S. Thompson saga *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1980).

Internet others have, too, and even critic Roger Ebert called the Oliver Stone-directed (and co-written with Boyle) *Salvador* a “throwback to a different kind of picture, to the Hunter S. Thompson story *Where the Buffalo Roam*, where hard-living journalists hit the road in a showdown between a scoop and an overdose” (1). Both films show popular, mythical, and complicated journalists behaving badly; Thompson and Boyle are continuously a hair's breadth away from violent encounters, their next big story, and jail.

Additionally, both Boyle and Thompson have healthy appetites for booze and drugs and employ a sidekick to bear witness, or perhaps just keep company, as they magnificently gallop toward self-destruction. Boyle has aging DJ Doctor Rock (played by James Belushi and offering some of the only bits of levity in the film) and Thompson gets attorney Oscar “Zeta” Acosta Fierro (aka Dr Gonzo, aka Carl Lazlo, Esq.).



DEATH AND DESTRUCTION EVERYWHERE.

It's easy to dismiss both (or ¾ of this group) as simply “crazy writers” who are “full of shit” and simply “political scandal and war junkies” but if that's the case, then why are their words and stories still so powerful and thought-provoking even now, long after they're gone?

Dialogue in *Salvador* is more forthright, however, between Boyle and Rock, including the idea that you're only as good as your next story, and you will be judged on the stories you wrote and what you have in the pipeline; dialogue between Boyle and a much more respectable photojournalist (played by John Savage) is “You gotta get close to get the truth – you get too close, you die.”

And get close everyone does. *Salvador* extends a lens into the beginning of El Salvador's Civil War that would eventually last for over a decade (1980-1992). James Woods' performance (as Boyle) may have you whispering gratitude for your own career choices while simultaneously questioning how anyone would willingly wander through a hellscap of broken dreams, corrupt government, and more corpses than I can contemplate.

Woods' Boyle may also have you wondering if his drugs and booze excess came before or after he witnessed mass murder and numerous other cruelties depicted, described, and surmised in the film. Moreover, have the viewer asking why some of the best journalists are excruciating and extreme personalities?



RICHARD'S PRESS PASS REPELS BULLETS.

However, if the covered journalistic content is extreme, can we not expect the personality to also be extreme? Boyle spends much of his time on pay phones to US contacts trying to scrape together press passes and travel funds, wheedling money from his El Salvador contacts and colleagues; it honestly feels one step short of panhandling.

The film's plot, as it can vaguely be called, has Boyle and Rock running amok and all willy-nilly, while schmoozing with generals, ambassadors, embassy spokespeople, aid workers, prostitutes, civilians, lovers, and friends looking for *The Right Angle*, *The Way In*, *The Ultimate Shot*, *The Career-Making Story* when the jaded journalist already knows the score and knows that everything will end badly and probably for everyone.

Ebert says it best (he did get it right occasionally): *Salvador's* "heart consists of Woods and Belushi, two losers set adrift in a world they never made, trying to play games by everybody else's rules" [1]. And the romance in the story, between Boyle and the much-younger, much more moral Maria (Elpedia Carrillo) – it was never going to end any other way than what the viewer gets.

It's difficult now, well over 20 years later, trying to untangle and make sense of the politics within El Salvador (with or without bringing the US's role into it), so imagine being a journalist in the midst of that madness – helplessly watching loved ones, women and children, (eventually over 75,000 civilians) die at the hands of government forces, death



WE GOT TO GET OUT OF THIS PLACE.

squads, and other cruel factions.

We can look at the small slivers of hope, such as those engaged in humanitarian aid and those who really attempted to bring atrocities to light, but with so much death, so much rape, so much everlasting trauma, one has to ask what it means to love a land where you don't personally belong and to love the people who cannot leave? What does it mean for you, as a writer, that even if you get the story, get the shot, your life is forever altered in ways you will never be able to comprehend nor resolve?

Boyle died September 1st 2016, right before the most recent bedlam within the US political arena, which is not to compare the political strife of one country to another, but I'd like to think Boyle would have found a lot to cover if he'd still been here with us. (Thompson, too, no doubt).

On his Facebook page, Oliver Stone wrote a frank, yet loving eulogy to his old co-writer and friend: "I never thought Richard would live long -- but at 74 (that's an estimate) he got farther than we thought. In '79, with barely a dime, he headed off to Salvador, 'where the action was,' to scrounge up some money from his network of media-mongers and war junkies... May Richard rest in peace -- although I don't think he can. He'll be back -- in some form or another." Besides, old journalists never die, and they may get de-pressed as the old cliché goes, but if they're really good, they'll also get the last word.



I'LL STUDY THE TAPE

broadcast news

BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

Writer, director, and producer James L. Brooks' influence runs deep in American entertainment. From *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* to *Taxi* to *The Simpsons*, Brooks has been a mainstay in television since the mid 60s. In 1983, he released his directorial debut, *Terms of Endearment*, which went on to win 5 Oscars. Coming off the success of *Terms*, he set out to make *Broadcast News*, a movie about television journalism.

Brooks spent three years conducting research and interviewing several professional female journalists. He worked mainly with Susan Zirinsky, who was a CBS News floor producer. Brooks based the main character, Jane Craig, on Zirinsky, and Zirinsky ended up with a producer's credit [1]. He origi-

nally wrote the character of Jane for Debra Winger. However, Winger got pregnant and had to pull out, so he considered other actresses, including Sigourney Weaver and Elizabeth Perkins, before deciding on Holly Hunter [2]. Hunter had the same build as Zirinsky, and once Hunter cut her hair, Zirinsky said the similarities were a bit much [3].

Jane is the news producer at the DC bureau of a national TV news network. Her BFF, Aaron Altman (Albert Brooks), is a reporter with the same intense devotion to producing investigative journalism without emotion or opinion. They both uphold the same tenets of journalistic integrity and they abhor the recent trends of entertainment-driven news reporting (how prescient).

MOVIE DETAILS: RELEASED DECEMBER 16, 1987 | WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JAMES L. BROOKS



JOAN CUSACK DESERVED MORE SCREEN TIME.

When Jane gives a terrible speech on the dangers of infotainment, she meets Tom Grunick (William Hurt). Tom tells her he used to be a sports reporter but was promoted to anchor at his news station. He's not a great reader, and while he's good on camera, he rarely understands the news he reports.

Tom asks Jane for help to learn more about being a journalist. Jane would rather sleep with him than teach him, and when she finds out Tom was hired at her station, she's angry that she'll have to work with a reporter that doesn't meet her intellectual standards.

Tom's arrival at the station kicks off not only a love triangle between the three main characters, but also a jealous rivalry between Aaron and Tom. When news arrives that a Lybian plane bombed a US military base in Italy during a Sunday company brunch, the network bosses pick Tom to anchor the desk and report the story. Aaron is pissed, and Jane unsuccessfully lobbies for Aaron to be on the air.

Knowing that Tom has no idea what this story is all about, Jane takes the lead and guides him through the entire broadcast, while Aaron calls her with tips he got from his sources. Tom is a huge success and says he loved having Jane inside his head. Jane is falling for him and agrees to go on a date with him to the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner. Meanwhile, Aaron gets his chance to anchor



TOM: WORKING TOGETHER IS LIKE GOOD SEX.

the news the night of the dinner, in what turns out to be the funniest scene in the movie when he has the worst case of flot sweat ever seen on TV.

That night doesn't go well for Jane either. Things start to get romantic, and Tom invites her back to his place. She says she'll meet him there but wants to check in with Aaron on how the night went. Aaron and Jane end up in a terrible fight in which Aaron tells her he's in love with her. Jane doesn't feel the same way. In fact, she thinks she's in love with Tom.

At this point in the movie, I had to ask myself if any of them are capable of loving each other. They are all so wrapped up in their jobs and their ideas of morally responsible journalism. James L. Brooks once said it was a movie about three people giving up on their last chance of real intimacy [4]. But, I don't think they ever had a chance to begin with.

After the night of the correspondence dinner, Tom and Jane plan a trip. Before she leaves, Aaron tells Jane that Tom manipulated his reporting. During a report Tom filmed on date rape, the camera cut to Tom and he was crying. Aaron figured out that Tom didn't actually cry in response to the victim's story, but he edited the shot to make it look real.

When Jane meets Tom at the airport, she confronts him and they blow up. Tom gets on the plane and



THIS IS THE BEST SCENE IN THE MOVIE!

Jane goes home (you can find the alternate ending on YouTube where Tom gets in the cab with Jane).

While I respect Jane's decision to stand by her principles, it seems to me that if one bad decision is all she needs to walk away from a potential love, then no one will ever meet her standards. Even Aaron would fail. In the beginning of the movie a bunch of reporters are standing around talking about ethically questionable decisions they would make to get info from a source, and Aaron says he would tell a source he loves them.

While James L Brooks might have set out to make a romance with meaning [5], he actually made one of the most highly regarded journalism movies of all time. Critics loved it, It was nominated for a bunch of awards (including seven Oscars), and it made \$67.3 million world wide (on a \$15 million budget) [6]. But, if I'm being honest, I wasn't that into the movie.

I didn't find any of the characters all that likeable. And, if Jane had high moral standards when it comes to journalism, why would she date her co-workers? I guess you could say that her social life was non-existent, so work was her only hope of finding love, but that's a lame reason for creating all that drama at work. Apparently, James L. Brooks came across newsroom co-workers dating in his research [7], but I still think it undermines



IT'S NOT AN 80'S MOVIE WITHOUT A GIANT BOW.

Jane's moral stance.

Furthermore, before Jane decides she likes Tom, another reporter (Jennifer) approaches Jane to ask if it's ok if she dates Tom. Jane says it's fine, but as soon as she gets the chance, she sends Jennifer to Alaska for an assignment about a serial killer. It's a super manipulative move to get Tom to herself.

One other thing I find problematic, and this isn't the movie's fault, is William Hurt. In the movie, he does a story about date rape, but in real life multiple women accused him of abuse. In her 2010 Memoir, *I'll Scream Later*, Marlee Matlin (Hurt's much younger girlfriend at the time) recounts that he was physically and emotionally abusive while he was filming this movie [8]. So, it just felt slimy watching him play this character and report this story.

All in all this is a good journalism movie, it just didn't grab me. There were some funny bits and I loved that it was actually filmed in DC (the on-air newsroom scenes were filmed in the backstage area of a great concert venue in Virginia, Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts) [9]. You should check it out and see if you think Jane's moral stance was worth it. I'm not sure it was.



A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE

switching channels

BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

In 1931, Howard Hughes produced a movie called *The Front Page*, which had been adapted from a stage show of the same name. In 1940, the movie was reimagined as *His Girl Friday*, and then in 1974 Jack Lemmon and Walter Mathau starred in a remake of *The Front Page*. *Switching Channels* is another iteration of this same story - a cable news manager (newspaper editor in earlier versions) tries to keep his best reporter on the job to cover one more story before her impending marriage (retirement in earlier versions) [1].

Switching Channels tells the story of Christy Coleran (Kathleen Turner), who is one of Chicago's best reporters. At the beginning of the movie, Christy takes a much needed resort vacation where she meets Blain Bingham (Christopher Reeves), a wealthy business owner. They fall in love and decide to get married over the course of like 2 weeks. Once they're married, they plan to live in New York where Christy will host a morning talk show.

Christy returns to the newsroom to resign from her job, but her boss (and ex-husband), Sully (Burt

**MOVIE DETAILS: RELEASED MARCH 4, 1988 | WRITTEN BY JONATHAN REYNOLDS
DIRECTED BY TED KOTCHEFF**



THIS RESTURANT LOOKED SUPER FUN.

Reynolds), convinces her to cover one last story before she leaves. Christy agrees and lands an interview with famous Chicago prisoner Ike Rosco. Ike was convicted of killing a police officer who was dealing drugs to his son. Ike's son died of an overdose from the drugs the cop sold him, and Ike didn't know the guy was a cop. So, the city is about to execute Ike despite the fact that most of Chicago thinks he should be pardoned.

After Christy's interview, the movie turns into a madcap caper led by Sully to prevent Christy from leaving for New York with Blaine and to help save Ike Roscoe. Sully is obviously jealous of Blaine and Christy, which ignites a love triangle. It's all pretty silly, but it's also reminiscent of another movie I wrote about for this issue: *Broadcast News*.

Switching Channels was released 79 days after *Broadcast News*. They both take place in a network newsroom, they both have strong female characters, and they both feature two men pining for one woman. Kathleen Turner did an interview with David Letterman in which he asked if *Switching Channels* was like *Broadcast News*. She said *Switching Channels* was better [2]. That's incorrect. But, let's compare, shall we?

One of the major themes running through *Broadcast News* is that of journalistic integrity and the dangers of entertainment-driven reporting. *Switching Channels* does not care about integrity



NED BEATTY AS A POLITICAL VILLAIN.

and, based on the opening montage, fully embraces infotainment. Right after Christy interviews Ike, when she thinks it's her last report on air before moving to New York, she gives her opinion on his execution. That's the kind of reporting Jane warned against in *Broadcast News*.

At the beginning of *Broadcast News*, Aaron asks other reporters if they would broadcast a prisoner execution. All of the reporters immediately say yes, and Aaron makes a crack about wrestling with a moral dilemma. In *Switching Channels*, a host of reporters show up to tape Ike's electrocution. Despite the fact that the reporters in *Broadcast News* say they'll do this, at least it's framed like an ethical question. There are no reservations from any of the *Switching Channels* reporters about filming it. The only reason the electrocution isn't aired is because the TV equipment blows the fuses and the power goes out as they flip the switch.

The only reporter who isn't there for the execution is Christy, but that's because she is with Blaine, who is trying to get Christy to New York. But, Blaine kind of sucked, and he wanted Christy to give up her whole life to marry him. In fact Christy's relationships with both Sully and Blaine are so condescending. In *Broadcast News*, Jane was in control of her relationships, and, even when Aaron confessed his love, Jane knew she didn't love him and therefore she didn't get with him. Christy, however, is manipulated by Sully who sets out to



CHRISTY REQUESTS A MAGIC TRICK DURING THIS.

destroy her relationship. He succeeds and Christy marries him again despite his behavior. Gross. In addition to these plot points and characters, *Broadcast News* was nominated for seven Oscars. *Switching Channels* was nominated for two Razzies - worst actor for Burt Reynolds and worst supporting actor for Christopher Reeves. One of the few things these movies have in common is that they both lost in their awards categories. Burt Reynolds lost to Sylvester Stallone for *Rambo III* and Reeves lost to Dan Aykroyd for *Caddyshack II* [3].

Christopher Reeves later wrote in his autobiography, *Still Me*, that he regretted making this movie. He was embarrassed by it and said he only signed on because he was depressed after going through a divorce. He took the role because originally Michael Caine was supposed to play Sully, and Reeves had previously worked with Caine on *Deathtrap*. However, by the time Reeves signed on, Michael Caine was no longer involved (according to IMDB, Caine was held up on *Jaws: The Revenge* [4]).

Casting Reynolds to replace Caine turned out to be a problem. Apparently Reynolds and Turner hated each other and fought constantly on set, leaving Reeves to mediate between them [5]. In a 2018 interview with *Vulture* Turner said, "Working with Burt Reynolds was terrible. The first day Burt came in he made me cry. He said something about not taking second place to a woman. His behavior was shocking" [6].



A GOOD METAPHOR FOR THEIR RELATIONSHIP.

This was the first time in his career that Burt Reynolds would not receive top billing in a movie, and apparently he was miffed that he lost top billing to a woman [7]. While Turner said she put the negativity aside for the performance, she wasn't convinced Reynolds did [8]. This might explain the condescension and prick energy that oozed from Reynolds throughout the entire movie.

Critical response to *Switching Channels* was mixed (Ebert liked it, Siskel did not). Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* said, "It fails so successfully on its own that it makes the benign *Broadcast News* look like a work of seminal satire" [9]. I like that he dissed both movies in one sentence. *Switching Channels* also did poorly at the box office, coming in \$6 million short of its budget [10].

So, this movie failed on many fronts. I'm glad I watched it right after watching *Broadcast News* so I had something better to compare it to (although I didn't really love *Broadcast News* either). While I chose to compare their differences, these two movies could also be examined as sort of sequels. Perhaps *Switching Channels* is the outcome of not heeding *Broadcast News's* warnings against entertainment-driven news. I guess if that's true, you could also say that our current news climate is the real-life version of *Switching Channels*, but way worse. No matter how you look at it, *Switching Channels* will always be a bad movie.

endnotes

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM (1980)

Release date: April 25, 1980

Written by: Hunter S. Thompson (stories) and John Kaye (screenplay)

Directed by: Art Linson

Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] Hunter Thompson died by suicide, 2005, and per his wishes his ashes were shot out of a cannon; "Ashes of Hunter S. Thompson blown into sky" (NY Times, 2005) <https://tinyurl.com/t79m2h7p>

[2] "Hunter S. Thompson's longtime editor ponders 'Fear and Loathing' in 2020" (Datebook, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/4erueu5t>

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE (1981)

Release date: September 18, 1981

Written by: Lawrence Kasdan

Directed by: Michael Apted

Essay by: Jessica MacLeish

[1] "AFI Catalog of Feature Films: Continental Divide (1981)" <https://tinyurl.com/j83bzfsj>

[2] Amblin: Continental Divide <https://tinyurl.com/5ex4x4zh>

[3] "AFI Catalog of Feature Films: Continental Divide (1981)" <https://tinyurl.com/j83bzfsj>

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Chillin' Big with Lawrence Kasdan" (Venice Magazine, 2001) <https://tinyurl.com/y6rd7hc>

[7] "AFI Catalog of Feature Films: Continental Divide (1981)" <https://tinyurl.com/j83bzfsj>

ABSENCE OF MALICE (1981)

Release date: November 19, 1981

Written by: Kurt Luedtke and David Rayfiel

Directed by: Sydney Pollack

Essay by: Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

[1] "Absence of Malice (1981)" (Columbia Journalism Review, 2011) <https://tinyurl.com/wsw75wzy>

[2] Switching Channels (1988) is adapted from the 1928 play, *The Front Page*, written by Charles MacArthur and journalist/foreign correspondent Ben Hecht, <https://tinyurl.com/5ra32d6w>

[3] "Kurt Luedtke" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/nbe9t9zf>

[4] "Hollywood update: Absence of Malice" (Columbia Journalism Review, 1981) <https://tinyurl.com/4n8ypm3z>

[5] "A Conversation with Paul Newman," (Christian Science Monitor, 1981) <https://tinyurl.com/cakf2rfs>

[6] "REEL-TO-REAL: Paul Newman Played A Role Based On Detroit Mafia Don Jack Tocco In Absence Of Malice" (The Gangster Report, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/vp2642k>

[7] "New York Times Co. v. Sullivan" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/nk56hsuc>

[8] "A Movie on the Press Stirs a Debate" (NY Times, 1981) <https://tinyurl.com/3wap5m4h>

[9] Ibid.

[10] "Sydney Pollack interview: 'If I had to do a movie and there was no love story in it I would just be bored'" (BFI, 2017) <https://tinyurl.com/p5bpwk9b>

[11] "Absence of Malice" (Roger Ebert, 1981) <https://tinyurl.com/d2kuxz4r>

[12] "Screen: Absence is Malice" (NY Times, 1981) <https://tinyurl.com/pdaae5xv>

FLETCH (1985)

Release date: May 31, 1985
Written by: Andrew Bergman (screenplay)
Gregory McDonald (novel)
Directed by: Michael Ritchie
Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "Fletch (novel)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/5u95tcde>

[2] "Fletch (film)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/a6nk56vk>

[3] "The Curse of Fletch" (Entertainment Weekly, 2010) <https://tinyurl.com/33yn4xk4>

[4] "Tim Matheson" (A.V. Club, 2009) <https://tinyurl.com/jpke9v9c>

[5] "Chevy Chase" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/an66wf4p>

[6] "Tim Matheson" (A.V. Club, 2009) <https://tinyurl.com/jpke9v9c>

[7] "Fletch (film)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/a6nk56vk>

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

PERFECT (1985)

Release date: June 7, 1985
Written by: James Bridges and Aaron Latham
Directed by: James Bridges
Essay by: Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

[1] For comparisons of past and modern gym culture, see "All sweat and no action" (Salon, 2006), <https://tinyurl.com/h4yflevm> and "Don't Hit on Me, Mr. Goodbody" (New York Times, 2006), <https://tinyurl.com/3yckbsz8>

[2] "All sweat and no action" (Salon, 2006) <https://tinyurl.com/27erxa3f>

[3] "How Did This Get Made: Perfect (An Oral History)" (Slash Film, 2015), <https://tinyurl.com/1a5sfz7r>

[4] "Perfect (1985)" gets a dismal Tomatometer and Audience Score on Rotten Tomatoes, <https://tinyurl.com/32shth4f>

[5] "A 'Perfect' Puzzle Travolta's New Movie: How Much Is Real?" (Washington Post, 1985), <https://tinyurl.com/ksc09xex>

[6] "The Story of John DeLorean - Falling from Grace" (Drivetribe, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/bw674kpx>

[7] "A 'Perfect' Puzzle Travolta's New Movie: How Much Is Real?" (Washington Post, 1985),

<https://tinyurl.com/ksc09xex>

SALVADOR (1986)

Release Date: April 23, 1986

Written by: Oliver Stone and Richard Boyle

Directed by: Oliver Stone

Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] "Salvador" (Roger Ebert, 1986),

<https://tinyurl.com/huxey3cx>

BROADCAST NEWS (1987)

Release date: December 16, 1987

Written by: James L. Brooks

Directed by: James L. Brooks

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "How 'Broadcast News' Predicted Journalism As We Know It" (The Ringer, 2017),

<https://tinyurl.com/5jrn2tku>

[2] "Broadcast News Trivia" (IMDB),

<https://tinyurl.com/fhyfwv8c>

[3] "How 'Broadcast News' Predicted Journalism As We Know It" (The Ringer, 2017),

<https://tinyurl.com/5jrn2tku>

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Broadcast News (Film)" (Wikipedia)

<https://tinyurl.com/u69h3vn3>

[7] "How 'Broadcast News' Predicted Journalism As We Know It" (The Ringer, 2017),

<https://tinyurl.com/5jrn2tku>

[8] "When Marlee Matlin Accused William Hurt of Sexual Assault" (The Daily Beast, 2017)

<https://tinyurl.com/sjd45xpp>

[9] "Broadcast News Trivia" (IMDB),

<https://tinyurl.com/fhyfwv8c>

SWITCHING CHANNELS (1988)

Release date: March 4, 1988

Written by: Jonathan Reynolds

Directed by: Ted Kotcheff

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "Switching Channels Trivia" (IMDB)

<https://tinyurl.com/cxarrddd>

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Switching Channels" (Wikipedia)

<https://tinyurl.com/22x3md8z>

[4] "Switching Channels Trivia" (IMDB)

<https://tinyurl.com/cxarrddd>

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Kathleen Turner, In Conversation"

(Vulture, 2018), <https://tinyurl.com/4rf6hab8>

[7] "Switching Channels Trivia" (IMDB)

<https://tinyurl.com/cxarrddd>

[8] "Kathleen Turner, In Conversation"

(Vulture, 2018), <https://tinyurl.com/4rf6hab8>

[9] "Film: Turner in 'Switching Channels'" (The New York Times, 1988),

<https://tinyurl.com/mhvkyapm>

[10] "Switching Channels" (Wikipedia)

<https://tinyurl.com/22x3md8z>

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