

ISSUE

AUGUST

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GIRLS, ON FILM

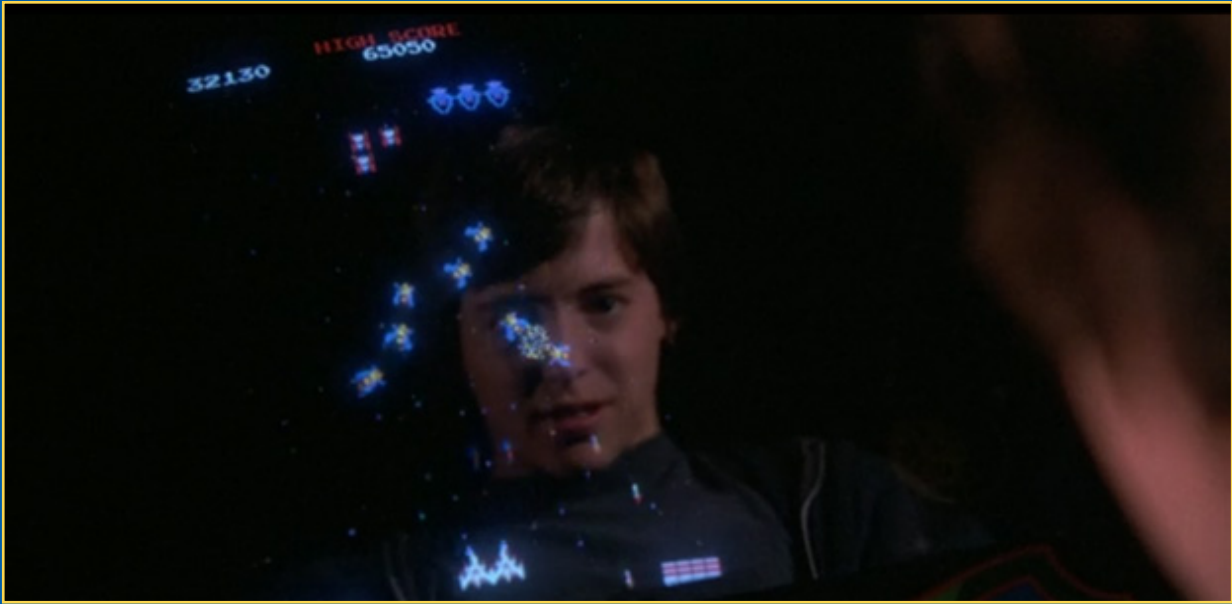
GAAMES

ISSUE

★ NEW GAME
LOAD SAVED
OPTIONS

HOPLESSLY DEVOTED TO 80S MOVIES

TRON | WARGAMES | ENDGAME | CLOAK AND DAGGER | CLUE | GOTCHA! | NIGHT OF THE DEMONS | THE WIZARD



GIRLS, ON FILM

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PLAYER ONE HAS ENTERED THE GAME

You are standing in a room. To your left is an RCA television, VCR, Presto Pop Corn Now, 6-pack of Shasta Cola, and floral couch, surrounded by a stack of video cassettes released between 1980 and 1989. To your right is a stack of 17 luscious, full-color issues of the *Girls, on Film* fanzine spotlighting 136 of those films written by the hopelessly devoted. Ahead is a laptop with an internet browser opened to girlsonfilmzine.com, which houses *these materials* in digital form. What do you want to do?

GET 80S MOVIES ABOUT GAMES

TRON (1982) Jeff Bridges gets hit with a laser that transports him into the software on his work computer.

WARGAMES (1983) Matthew Broderick plays a teenager who almost starts World War III in one of the first movies that focused on computer hacking.

ENDGAME (1983) A slew of telepathic mu-

tants, led by a stone-cold killer, fight their way to freedom from fascistic rule in this sleazy D'Amato masterpiece filled with an all-star cast of B-movie heavyweights.

CLOAK AND DAGGER (1984) A boy who loves to play spy is pursued by real killers seeking a game cartridge containing military secrets.

GOTCHA! (1985) A college nerd who spends his days on campus playing spy inadvertently becomes the target of international espionage.

CLUE (1985) A whodunit murder mystery and the first-ever movie to be based on a board game.

NIGHT DEMONS (1988) It's all naughty ca-raousing and frisky party games in the dark until teens summon demons.

THE WIZARD (1989) Three kids hitch to California to compete in video game contest in the movie that introduced Super Mario Bros 3 to the public.

BEHIND THE ZINES

Girls, on Film is a quarterly fanzine about 80s movies. All issues are available, for free, on our website. Contact Stephanie and Janene for information about purchasing full-color print copies, trading zines, and opportunities to collaborate. We also invite 80s fans to submit guest essays. Send a bio and writing sample to the email address below.

Website: girlsonfilmzine.com
Email: info@girlsonfilmzine.com
Twitter: [@girlson80sfilms](https://twitter.com/girlson80sfilms)
Instagram: [@girlson80sfilms](https://www.instagram.com/girlson80sfilms)
Facebook: [thegirlsonfilmzine](https://www.facebook.com/thegirlsonfilmzine)

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 SCENZA

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.

CONTRIBUTORS

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 SCENZA

Matt loves to dissect and analyze everything. He has co-written several essays in this 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 WRITER

NOAH RYMER

Stuck in a perpetual state of mind melt, Noah Rymer is always on an *Indiana Jones*-esque hunt for the cool and unusual within the witches' brew of psychotronic film. When he isn't splattering his brain matter over the sick flicks he finds, he's caught in a mosh at his local punk show.



END OF LINE: TRON

BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

Tron is a science fiction movie in which a computer programmer gets transported into the software of the computer at his old job. Sounds weird, right? It is. *Tron* came out in 1982, and the special effects and animation were groundbreaking at the time (and I think they're still cool today). It's pretty lacking in the storytelling department, but a friend of mine who loves this movie implored me to remember that, in 1982 (when she saw it in theaters), *Tron* was the shit.

The plot of *Tron* revolves around the employees of a company called ENCOM. At the beginning of the movie, ENCOM engineers Alan (Bruce Boxleitner) and Lora (Cindy Morgan) both realize their security access to their projects has been restricted. Alan goes to talk to VP Ed Dillinger (David Warner) who says it's just a security measure because ENCOM's Master Control Program (MCP) de-

tected an outside threat.

Dillinger wasn't being completely honest. Yes, someone tried to hack into the MCP, but more importantly, Dillinger has realized that the MCP has expanded into a powerful virtual intelligence and has become a power-hungry machine. The MCP, which talks to Dillinger through a touch screen built into his desk, has plans to hack into the Pentagon to increase its capabilities, and it seems like Dillinger can do nothing to stop it.

Lora and Allan, who are both pretty annoyed that they can't access their work projects, figure out that former ENCOM employee Flynn (Jeff Bridges) is the one who tried to hack into the MCP. Flynn, who now runs an arcade, says that Dillinger stole several games that he built, and he hacked in to try to find proof that Dillinger's rise to VP was only pos-

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ALAN GETS
ZAPPED
IN.



sible because he plagiarized Flynn's software. Lora, Alan, and Flynn decide to break into ENCOM and unlock Tron, a security program Alan created, which would allow them to override the MCP and find Flynn's original programming.

Once inside ENCOM, Flynn quickly comes into conflict with the MCP, and the MCP uses an experimental laser to digitize Flynn and upload him into the computer's mainframe. Inside the virtual world of the MCP, computer programs have human likeness and they refer to the programmers that created them as "users." Also, all the human actors who we saw in the actual world have program counterparts in the virtual world (kind of like the *Wizard of Oz* except without all the dancing and singing).

Inside the computer, the MCP and its second in command, Sark (aka Dillinger), capture programs and try to get them to renounce their users. He forces them into duels where the losing program dies. Flynn needs to find Tron (aka Alan) and then find a way to escape Sark's rule. The rest of the movie follows Flynn as he uses his knowledge of the programs he built and his abilities as a programmer to find a way out of the computer mainframe.

I gotta be honest here, this plot is super boring. It's not set up well at the beginning (I felt like I was starting in the middle of the movie with the MCP gaining intelligence plotline), and it's kind of hard to follow throughout. The acting is pretty stilted, although Jeff Bridges is his usual charming self, and the movie is

really slow. All of that being said, I realize that with *Tron*, the plot isn't really that important. It's the effects that made this movie stand out at the time.

Tron was the first movie to use any form of computer animation extensively, and by that I mean about 15 to 20 minutes of the movie uses computer animation. However, most of the computer generated animation was light patterns or digital "terrain." At the time, the technology that allowed computer animation to combine with live action did not exist, so the computer generated sequences had to be interspersed with the live action scenes [1].

The live action scenes in the digital world were all filmed in black and white and color was added to each frame in a separate process (the *Tron* Wikipedia page has a detailed explanation of the process of coloring the film cels, if you're interested in learning more about it). In this respect, *Tron* was like an animated movie [2]. If you think of it like that, it makes sense that Disney hired French comic book artist Jean Giraud (aka Moebius) to do the main set and costume design for the film, industrial designer Syd Mead to do vehicle design, and high-tech commercial artist Peter Lloyd to design the environments [3].

While *Tron* used groundbreaking technology that produced effects previously unheard of in 1982, it also predicted the technological world we live in today. As I mentioned earlier, Dillinger uses a touch screen computer to communicate with the MCP. Now, we all carry touch screens in our pockets. In an in-

END OF LINE: TRON | BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT



interview with Den of Geek, Writer and Director Steve Lisberger said, “This very idealistic idea came to us, which was that if we could all access the information in computers, if we could all communicate, wouldn’t the world be a much better place” [4]. Looking at it through a 2022 lens, maybe not, but Lisberger didn’t see the negatives at the time.

In addition to Lisberger’s idealism about the roles of computers in everyday life, *Tron* presents a world in which real-world programmers have digital versions of themselves. As the Den of Geek article points out, “In a modern video game industry now dominated by on-line multiplayer games, we now fully understand the concept of the avatar, an idealized version of ourselves that we use to interact with the world behind our computer screen... the idea of Users and Programs makes more sense now, you might argue, than it did almost 30 years ago” [5].

Furthermore, *Tron* predicts the influence that video games and software developers would have on the world. This movie came out before Microsoft wrote Windows and before Nintendo became a popular gaming company. *Tron* showed a world where a software company was a global corporation that had influences in both private and government business [6]. And, much like *WarGames*, *Tron* introduced hacking to the public before we even had a word for it.

And, perhaps, this foreshadowing was part of the reason *Tron* didn’t do well in the box of-

fice. Audiences were probably not ready for a movie that used computer programming language like it was regular dialogue (although I would argue that it doesn’t work even now). In 2010, Joseph Kosinski, the director of *Tron: Legacy*, said, “I think conceptually this notion of a world where we have digital versions of ourselves that exist in an online space, in 1982, people didn’t quite grasp that concept. It was literally a decade ahead of its time” [7].

Tron had a budget of \$17 million, and it grossed \$50 million world wide, which was Disney’s highest grossing live action film in 5 years. However, it was still seen as a financial disappointment. Apparently, *Tron* was supposed to come out around Christmas of 1982. However, the chairman of the Disney Board, Card Walker, wanted to compete with *The Secret of NIMH*, so he moved the release date up to July. Unfortunately for Disney, *Tron* also had to compete with *E.T.*, *Star Trek II*, *Blade Runner*, and *Poltergeist* [8]. Perhaps if he had just waited until Christmas, the movie would have made more money.

In 2010, *Tron: Legacy* came out as a sequel to the original. Jeff Bridges and Bruce Boxleitner both returned for it. The movie did well at the box office, but it seems like it had some of the same issues as the original in terms of the story. I don’t know. I haven’t seen it. And, since I didn’t love the original, I probably won’t see the sequel. I know *Tron* has a cult following now, but I just can’t get into it. I’m happy for you if you can.



SHALL WE PLAY A GAME? WARGAMES

BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

WarGames was the first main-stream movie to depict hacking and remote computing, which apparently blew people's minds in 1983 [1]. I always thought this movie was silly, but I have since learned that it actually had a huge impact on both tech culture and government cybersecurity policy. Because it depicted very real hacking methods, the hacker community loved it and the government was worried about it. Who knew Matthew Broderick's first big role would help establish American internet law?

WarGames begins with a surprise nuclear attack drill in which the US Government learns that some of their missile controllers refused to carry out the launch for fear of killing millions of people. Dr. John McKittrick (Dabney Coleman), head of the systems engineering team at NORAD, decides that missile launches should be automated to avoid the human element. In

a matter of minutes, a NORAD super computer called WOPR (War Operation Plan Response, pronounced whopper), takes over launching responsibilities.

These opening scenes at NORAD were cool, and it made it look like our government was super high tech (it wasn't). I thought the movie took away from the cool sets by playing goofy patriotic music over these scenes. It made me feel like I was watching *Stripes* instead of a cool hacker flick. Anyway, I digress.

Enter Seattler high-schooler David Lightman (Mathew Broderick). David is smart but lazy and prefers to spend his time in the arcade instead of going to class. When he finds out that he is failing biology, he steals the password to the school computer system, hacks in, and changes his grade. David also takes the opportunity to show off for his friend Jennifer (Ally Sheedy) and



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STUFFY
GENERALS
WHO JUST
DON'T GET
THE KIDS
THESE
DAYS.

change her grade too.

One night, David gets a catalog from a computer company that teases their upcoming game releases. He decides to hack into their system to see if he can access the games early. In order to do this, David finds the local area codes where the computer company is located. Then he uses a program that scans all the phone numbers with those area codes and his computer calls all of them until it makes contact with another modem.

When David's computer finally links up with another modem, he's certain he found the gaming company. He asks the computer to play games with him, and the computer gives him a list of options, including chess and global thermonuclear war. David jumps right in and starts playing global thermonuclear war. He chooses to play as the Soviets, and he and Jennifer come up with a list of desired targets. But, right before he launches his missiles, David's parents interfere and he has to shut down the computer.

What David doesn't realize is that the computer he hacked wasn't the gaming company. It was the WOPR. The WOPR alerts everyone at NORAD about the possibility of a nuclear attack from the Russians. At first, they believe that the attack is simply a computer simulation, but as the movie goes on, the military thinks it could be legit. If the US retaliates, it will effectively start World War III. The tension builds as everyone tries to figure out what the hell is going on.

The movie's depiction of hacking is super realistic because the writers worked with early computer hackers to make sure they got it right. For example, the way David's computer scanned and called all the phone numbers was a legitimate hacking strategy. In an article in *Wired*, John Draper, an early hacker, said "The use of a dialer scanner program came from me repeatedly dialing up numbers until I found a computer modem. It's called wardialing now because David Lightman used it in the movie to make contact with the Norad computer" [2]. David Scott Lewis, the model for Broderick's character, said, "Hacking was easy back then. There were few if any security measures. It was mostly hackers versus auditing types" [3].

I have to admit that I thought *WarGames* was hokey and kind of slow. But, I have come to find out that it had a huge influence on making hacker culture more mainstream. The year after *WarGames* was released, a hacker zine called *2600* came out. In 1993, the first hacker convention (called Defcon in a nod to the movie) was held. The movie is also held in high regard with Silicon Valley tech employees. "Google hosted a 25th-anniversary screening in May, where keyboard jockeys cheered Broderick's DOS acrobatics. (Imagine *Rocky Horror*, but picture the audience in Hawaiian shirts and mandals.) 'Many of us grew up with this movie,' Google co-founder Sergey Brin told the packed house. 'It was a key movie of a generation, especially for those of us who got into computing'" [4].



WarGames also inspired the government to worry about the dangers of computer hacking. Kevin Mitnick, an early hacker who served five years in prison for computer related crimes, says this movie influenced the way the government treated him during his trial. He said, “I was held in solitary confinement for nearly a year because a prosecutor told a judge that if I got near a phone, I could dial up Norad and launch a nuclear missile. I never hacked into Norad. And when the prosecutor said that, I laughed — in open court. I thought, ‘This guy just burned all his credibility.’ But the court believed it” [5].

In a book called *Dark Territory*, author Fred Kaplan says that, after a viewing of *WarGames* arranged by the movie’s writers, Ronald Regan asked his Joint Chiefs of Staff if something like this could really happen. “Reagan’s casual inquiry set off the first of many efforts by the intelligence establishment to figure out a way to bolster America’s defensive and offensive cyber capabilities” [6]. Kaplan traces Regan’s initial concerns all the way to the government’s data mining on American citizens post 9/11. It’s weird to think about it this way, but, according to Kaplan, decades of American cybersecurity policy was shaped by an 80s movie character who simply wanted to play new computer games [7].

In addition to the attention *WarGames* got from the government, the media also started questioning the dangers of hacking as portrayed in this movie and significantly amplified early discussions of information technology. They were

all asking the question if a “*WarGames* scenario” could really happen. Apparently, this discussion contributed to the first U.S. federal internet policy, the Counterfeit Access Device and Computer Fraud and Abuse Act of 1984 [8]. This law prohibits accessing a computer without authorization where, previously, the government would have charged computer crimes as mail and wire fraud [9].

With all of this publicity, *WarGames* was a massive box office success. It was the fifth-highest grossing movie of 1983, and made a worldwide box office of \$124.6 million on a \$12 million budget. It was nominated for three Oscars (Best Cinematography, Sound, and Screenplay). There were also a number of adaptations, including a video game made for ColecoVision, a 2006 sequel (*WarGames: The Dead Code*), which went straight to DVD, and a 2015 interactive media reboot [10].

I can understand how seeing this technology in action for the first time would have been awesome in 1983. And I really appreciate that the writers took such care to accurately depict how hackers operated back in the day. While the hacking was realistic, there were so many other plot points that I found too far fetched to really get into this movie. But it’s definitely worth a watch to see Broderick before he became Ferris Bueller (also the giant floppy discs David uses made me laugh).



TV CASUALTIES: ENDGAME

BY NOAH RYMER

A *vengeurs who?* In this psychotronic pastiche of Italian ripoff cinema, we're only rooting for the avengers of the WASTE-LAND! Yet we still get an incredible crossover cast just the same, sans Marvel!

Featuring the acting talents of Al Cliver (a mainstay from classic Fulci flix such as *The Beyond*, *Zombi*, and *The Black Cat*), Laura Gemser (who could forget her as the beautiful Emmanuel?), George Eastman (in a slew of D'Amato trash-ics), *Cemetery Man* director Michele Soavi in a cameo role, and helmed by spaghetti-sleaze director Joe D'Amato, *Endgame* is a teenage video store clerk's wet dream of low-rent post-apocalyptic madness!

Rats scurry about the irradiated landscape as telepathic mutants are hunted down by futur-

istic, fascist police squadrons, while a talking head reporter tells of another round of the world-famous event Endgame in the works. Ron Shannon (Al Cliver) volunteers for the seventh time as prey against the predators, and Lilith (Laura Gemser) ropes the highly capable assassin into her ranks in order to free the mutants from the clutches of the totalitarian government. Together, Ron and Lilith form a band of mercenaries in order to escort the mutants to freedom, leaving a slew of bodies in their righteous conquest.

Cliver's clad in stylish black leather pants and jacket, with boots to match and a bullet belt slung 'round his waist to accessorize, and it seems like the rest of D'Amato's denizens are cast in the same 70s punk/goth-inspired clothes as well, with military officials sporting sharply



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CAN'T A
GUY HIDE
IN PEACE?

tailored jackets, complemented by turtlenecks slotted underneath. The migrating mutants are wrapped in leper bandages and ragged rags, some with a distinctive *Mad Max 2*-flair denoting main character status such as Liliith.

Siouxsie Su-inspired eyeliner and enough hairspray to pierce the ozone layer (maybe that's why there's so much blue haze everywhere?) pollute the screen amidst eerie synth murmurings, making for a moody sci-fi jam. Maybe all that fog is to distract the audience from realizing that most of the set is simply blocked-off Italian streets at night, coated with a vivid assortment of dreck and ephemera to make an authentically anarchic feel. But it just adds to the charm! Seems like all we're missing now is a tall bottle of J&B to bring the whole production home!

The hunters themselves show off too when it comes to the clothes they rock, featuring such retro-futurist aesthetics as brown-leather gladiatorial wear with a flowy crimson cape, silver cowboy boots, and a Charlie Bronson-meets-techno-Western getup. Are they dressed to impress or dressed to kill cause they're absolutely slaying with their looks! If this was a runway they would've already had this in the (body) bag, but looks sure as hell ain't everything when it comes to combat. Maybe all that metallic-KISS eye makeup will send

a shock whenever they meet face-to-face with their opponent!

Carlo Maria Cordio cranks out a masterful synth tapestry, dripping with tension and icy chord progressions. It's no secret that his C.A.M. Music Library recordings have graced a multitude of Italy's finest trashterpieces, including *Pieces*, *Aenigma*, *Monster Hunter*, and *Touch Of Death*. Both eerie and frantic, suspenseful yet energetic, Cordio's churning soundtrack makes for a fantastic fight-or-flight backdrop against the multitudes of gang warfare.

Perhaps the greatest part about this film, aside from the excellent casting and director, is the fact that a shadowy board of officials discuss the idea of nuking Neo-Italy to high heaven, citing that "...there are five million people watching T.V. Even another nuclear attack would not distract them. No one will notice a thing."

It's a means of getting rid of the mutants, as if the citizens wouldn't notice (another) thermo-nuclear detonation in their vicinity. Sure, there are millions of self-absorbed Americans *today* but I'm fairly certain getting nuked like a piece of cold lasagne in the microwave would *definitely* faze them!

Somewhere here there's a metaphor to using dirty bombs to kill off the homeless and improv-



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DEATH
RACE.

erished whilst maintaining structural integrity of cities in order to aid in gentrification and to raise property values but that's neither here nor there nor elsewhere unless you're vastly interested in dissecting sociological meaning from cinema swill.

It's also hard not to notice the eugenic overtones of the government in dealing with the mutants, so much so to the point where it wouldn't be hard to write the film as a metaphor for The Holocaust, with the mutants being stand-ins for the Jewish people. Just a thought.

The stoic stormtroopers soldier on, and it's around this point where you wonder when one of these Hitler Youths will bark out "I'm just following orders!" in response to a barbaric massacre of innocent civilians just to *really* nail down the point that these are *not* the good guys! Alas, our gas-masked militaristic husks just march through deserted tunnels, and no such semblance is uttered. Yet the synth stabs and stings give it a grandiose feeling through and through, and if I'm gonna watch a bunch of black-coated creeps sift through urban silt I'd much like it to be contextualized within a symphony of psychotronic!

The one-on-one fight scenes in this feel so unnatural and scripted, like watching a cut scene play out in a 90s point-and-click fantasy adven-

ture CDI. The silver-booted brigadier leaping down from the (invisible) banister and leaping on our Kurt Russell-wannabe, then proceeding to roundhouse kick the devil out of the poor man while *Legend Of Zelda*-core boss music plays in the background has *got* to be the best action sequence in any non-poliziotteschi EVER! But the roaming motorcycle gangs and massive shootout setpieces really ramp up the carnage in the third act too! There really *is* something for everyone!

Endgame is a lovably sloppy mess of Euro-trash that holds a place deep within my cinephile heart as a seminal film that turned me on to the oddball realm of low-rent cinema. It's a cut-and-paste of sci-fi tropes thrown at a wall with pure Pollock intensity but through a lens that only Joe D'Amato could provide, giving it a unique feel amongst a sea of rip-offs. It promises as much as it delivers, and every greasy dollar was spent with absolute love and care on the things that matter the most: special effects!

D'Amato knows what grindhouse aficionados like us want, and that's a film with little budget but a lot of heart. *Bellissima!*



SPY GAMES: CLOAK AND DAGGER

BY JANENE SCELZA & MATT SCELZA

Cloak & Dagger is a fun, Hitchcock-styled kiddie thriller that feels like a network TV prime time movie of the week. Like *Gotcha!* (1985), discussed later in this issue, it involves an imaginative youngster who gets caught up in real-life danger. But, *Cloak & Dagger* did it a hell of a lot better.

Central to the plot is an Atari game of the same name. In the (frankly, overstimulating) game, made in 1983, you control Agent X, who must dodge everything from explosives to flying eyeballs (what is this, *Ghoul School?!*) as he descends floors to Dr. Boom's underground bomb factory. To win the game, Agent X must destroy the factory and safely resurface [1]. The *Cloak & Dagger* movie also involves top-secret spy stuff, but nothing about underground bomb factories.

The original idea for *Cloak & Dagger* had nothing to do with video games. It began as a remake of the 1947 film, *The Window* (1949) [2], adapted

from Cornell Woolrich's 1947 short story, *The Boy Cried Murder*, which, as you may have guessed, was inspired by the Aesop's Fable, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. Horror screenwriter and director Tom Holland (*Fright Night*, *Child's Play*) and Bill Phillips (uncredited), would eventually change that (to which *NY Times Reviewer* Janet Maslin would say: oh no! more movies about boys caught up in computer games, but at least it is a good movie [3]). The change may also explain why the video game cartridge is sometimes referred to as a tape in the movie.

Henry Thomas, of *ET* fame, is 11-year old Davey Osborne. The boy has a wild imagination and a lot of time to himself. His mother recently died and his father, Hal (Dabney Coleman) is an Airforce pilot who is always working. Davey's only friends are his neighbor, Kim (Christina Nigra, who's comical frankness reminds us of Ramona Marquez on the Britcom *Outnumbered*) and nerdy adult game shop owner, Morris (William Forsythe).



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 GAME OVER
 FOR JACK
 FLACK
 WHEN KIDS
 DON'T
 WANT TO
 PLAY.

Davey loves playing spy and frequently imagines himself involved in international intrigue alongside his hero Jack Flack (also Dabney Coleman). While picking up software catalogs for Morris, Davey witnesses a real murder and just before the victim dies, he gives Davey a *Cloak & Dagger* Atari cartridge with cryptic instructions to find some military blueprints hidden in the game. The assassins know that Davey has the cartridge and they will do anything to get their hands on it. Unfortunately, no one believes Davey's story about dead agents and games with spy shit, so it is up to the boy, (with some guidance from Jack Flack, a "sort of paramilitary Tinker Bell" (to use the *LA Times's* words [3])) to save the day.

Cloak & Dagger is a well-paced cat-and-mouse thriller with an excellent cast, particularly Henry Thomas, who was nominated for a Young Artist Award, and Dabney Coleman as wisecracking Jack Flack. (Also, check out Louie Anderson in a brief cameo as a taxi driver). The movie was filmed around San Antonio, Texas (birthplace of Henry Thomas), and some of the action plays out in popular tourist destinations like the Riverwalk Cruise, the Japanese Tea Garden, and most notably, a basement-less replica of the Alamo. It's rather hilarious watching Davey outwit two killers while squeezing around a small boat filled with tourists while the frustrated boat captain keeps pleading with the men to stay seated during an otherwise pleasant cruise around the canal.

Tom Holland and Australian director Richard Franklin both already had practice with this kind

of material, albeit not entirely for the kiddies. In Holland's *Scream for Help* (1984), a teenage girl learns that her stepfather is trying to murder her mother (and warns people, to no avail). In Franklin's wonderful *Roadgames* (1981) a truck driver nearly drives himself mad (pun intended) trying to prove another trucker committed a murder while simultaneously being hunted by the potential killer. (Holland would continue this "boy who cried wolf" trend with the 1985 horror film, *Fright Night*).

The pair had previously worked together on *Psycho II* (1983) and you'll find ample references to Hitchcock in *Cloak & Dagger*, such as: *Rear Window* (similar story); *North by Northwest* (an innocent kid caught up in a murder and espionage); *Vertigo* (the victim plunges gracefully down the opening of stairwell); *Sabotage* (kids and time bombs); and a villain with missing finger (*The 39 Steps*) [4]. We take this moment to give props to the cinematographer for some dope scene transitions.

Perhaps because of this cinematic matchmaking, *Cloak & Dagger* teeters about as much as it can between the kiddie stuff and modeling itself on more adult fare. As one Redditor commented on a recent post about the film: "What's so good about it isn't that it's fantastically crazy, like a little boy is living out a dream scenario of espionage. It's fucking scary what he's going through. His life is legitimately in danger and the bad guys are NOT the cartoony villains that usually populate movies with young heroes" [5].



Actually, the bad guys are a *teensy* cartoonish, occasionally moving a little too slow or missing a little easily. However, at the same time, they threaten kids with guns (including one big ass gun and some frank description about the potential aftermath), knives, and explosives. In one scene, Davey discovers his buddy Morris dead in the trunk of one of the henchmen's cars because the poor guy knew too much. Later, Davey is forced to kill one of the villains in self-defense. And later, Kim is held hostage and the goons plant a bomb on a plane. Sure, there's not much blood and guts, but it's crazy stuff to see in a PG-rated movie. It probably also gave the film more universal appeal. (Janene was introduced to this film during a rainy day screening at elementary school or at summer camp around the same year).

Davey is a smart, clever kid, but then you remember that he's still just a boy. When things get really intense, he wants to stop playing, but it's no longer just a game. Jack Flack is one of those imaginary sidekicks that can be summoned away when the kid stops playing make believe. Luckily by that point, Davey's dad figures out that his son was telling the truth and steps in to help thwart a mid-flight disaster in a rather unusual opportunity for father-son bonding.

The movie was a modest commercial hit, releasing in theaters in July 1984 as a double header with *The Last Starfighter*, another coming-of-age movie based around a video game. It wasn't until the movie had made regular rounds on cable that it generated a cult following.

It's a very dated film... like musty hardcover encyclopedias from the public library kind of dated. Screenwriter Tom Holland said in a 2011 interview that he was interested in remaking *Cloak & Dagger*, noting Universal's inattentiveness to the film's fanbase. "Universal is brain dead. They have been forever, but maybe that will change with Comcast taking over. [*Cloak & Dagger*] was a hugely popular movie. It's a terrific film, it's a favorite of mine and it affected several generations. They played it recently at the New Beverly and I went down to do a Q&A afterwards. I looked at the audience and, yes, there were a few girls there - and it was packed, by the way - but it was almost all male. I would say that the males were about 30 to 38 years old [6]." (As we discuss later in this issue, Todd Holland, who directed *The Wizard* (1989), would probably agree that this was Universal's prime flop era after the shit they pulled on that movie, especially the dodgy marketing).

So far, Tom Holland hasn't gotten his wish for a remake. (The more recent, short-lived *Cloak & Dagger* TV series is an unrelated property based on a Marvel comic). However, it has popped up in the movie review podcast circuit in recent years, and just this year, was released on 4K HD Blu-ray with all the wonderful extras that flop Universal couldn't be bothered to put on the DVD [7]. Oh, and did we mention that Brian May did the soundtrack?!

We definitely recommend that you go forth, and check out this movie.



YOU GOT SOME RED ON YOU: GOTCHA!

BY JANENE SCELZA & MATT SCELZA

Much like the young protagonist of *Cloak & Dagger*, discussed a few pages back in this issue, a habit of playing spy also comes in handy for the main character of *Gotcha!* The 1985 melodrama reunited Anthony Edwards with *Revenge of the Nerds* director Jeff Kanew for a new, ridiculous spin on the Lowly Boy Virgin story: the quest for sex leads to... *dun dun dunnn...* international espionage!

The movie is just as blah as it was when we first saw it 20-some years ago, though we were expecting far worse. The Lowly Boy Virgin stories are already a tough sell. They are the ones about the nice guy nerd who can't get laid and will not shut the fuck up about it. He tends to get terrible advice from his sexually experienced, chauvinist buddies. The crisis of manhood inevitably leads to some wild predicament. And then boom! The nerd has sex and the angels rejoice. That's essentially the first 20 minutes of *Gotcha!*

Anthony Edwards stars as the exceptionally vanilla Lowly Boy Virgin Moore... Jonathan Moore. The UCLA freshman is a master of pretend spy, chasing classmates around campus with a paintball pistol — remarkably, without consequence — in a perpetual game of Assassin. (It seems like a fun game to play with a large group, but for your safety, we'd recommend leaving the toy guns at home and tagging your opponents with an app instead [1]). Jon Boy's pretend sniper skills may be top notch, but it doesn't earn him any cool points. He is pretty clueless about most everything else, especially women.

While most Lowly Boy Virgins are dutifully swept away by their buddies to boobie-filled beach destinations for Spring Break, Jon Boy and his Casanova roommate, Manolo (played by Jsu Garcia, sometimes credited as Nick Corri), head to a more sophisticated destination: Europe. In Paris, while Manolo is convincing Swedish girls that he's

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LINDA
FIOREN-
TINO WAS
TOO COOL
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MOVIE.



a sexy terrorist (yup...), Jonathan annoys French waiters and piques the interest of too-cool Czech ex Pat Sasha (Linda Fiorentino). Mere minutes into the conversation she tells Jonathan that she's got a thing for baby-faced "wiergens" (virgins) like him (*très charmant* this confession is not), so they hook up. Cue the obligatory Journey-esque rock ballad montage with bicycle shennanigans, as you did in the 80s.

But how do we go from sex romp to spy melodrama? The Lowly Boy Virgin will inevitably get involved in some wild predicament. And, Jon Boy gets himself mixed up in the wildest predicament of all: actual Soviet spy shit.

Sasha is a courier of unknown things for unknown people and she is due in Berlin for work. So Jon Boy, "letting the little guy do the thinking for the big guy" (so sayeth Manolo without a hint of irony), joins her. During Bring Your Bambi Lover to Work Day (several days, actually), Sasha periodically disappears to transport said mystery packages, dodge Soviet bullets, buy strudel, and call her loverboy (*Trash!*).

Then the movie turns into Cold War Kiddie Patriot fare, because kicking Commie ass is what the American adolescents did in the 1980s (see also: *War Games* (1983), *Red Dawn* (1984), *Moving Target* (1988), and *Ruskies* (1987)). Shit gets serious when Sasha gets into trouble with ze secret police, but not before she plants a McGuffin on unsuspecting Jonathan.

To the film's credit, it is one of the few (if not only) American Kiddie Patriot movies that gave us a glimpse of Cold War life outside of the United States. The Berlin Wall was still standing, dividing communist East Germany (the DDR) and the allied West. Sasha and Jonathan travel to both and it is, at least as shown here, just what you would expect: bleak in the East, and darling capitalism in the West. (Sidenote: check out Ian Walker's 1986 memoir *Zoo Station: Adventures in East and West Berlin* for true tales of life in divided Germany).

Anyways, cat-and-mouse chases ensue with Sasha and Jonathan being trailed by Soviet spies, and there are some great close calls. Unfortunately, the story is never really developed. It simply seems to be our heroes against comically uptight East Germany officials and a stereotypical bald, bespectacled Russian criminal mastermind. What exactly it is that they want from Sasha that she eventually hides on Jonathan is never explained.

One Letterboxed commentator put it best: "the plot is like Diet Caffeine-Free James Bond Zero Lite---there's some sneakin', there's some runnin', there's some stripsearchin' at the border, and there's some enjoyable light comedy interactions between our principal trio, but honestly not a lot happens here" [2]. It's also really hard to reconcile dumb sex romp comedy with spy drama, so Jonathan deals with dumb parents (Alex Rocco is totally wasted), a dumb housekeeper, dumb cops, and sometimes, dumb baddies. Eventually, the action spills over stateside in what felt

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THE LOWLY
BOY
VIRGIN
SHARP
SHOOTER.



like an ending that no one really knew what to do with. We're no screenwriters, but it seems like it would've been easy to make up some generic shit about why the McGuffin was so important. At least Manolo makes a brief comeback (he deserved a better script and more screen time).

That don't impress Rogert Ebert (and others) much, who felt like Sasha should've been the primary focus of the movie. She was not only the more interesting character, but Linda Fiorentino is a more engaging onscreen presence than the wet noodle that is Anthony Edwards in this movie. Wrote Ebert: "[Sasha is] bright, exotic, resourceful and mysterious, and yet we get the story told from the point of view of the campus nerd. Instead of Plot A (simple-minded undergraduate meets beautiful spy, then blunders through strange situation), why not Plot B (fascinating woman is forced to use dense undergraduate as an accomplice to pull off spy caper)?" [3]

Interestingly, Universal Pictures originally wanted Craig Sheffer in Anthony Edwards's part. You probably know Sheffer. He frequently played the muscly dickhead boyfriend of the misguided girl next door. (Stephanie discusses his film, *Voyage of the Rock Aliens* in our first issue). Kanew seemed relieved when a roomful of secretaries attending screen tests favored Edwards [4].

Unsurprisingly, *Gotcha!* was not a huge hit with critics (even recent critics), and it fizzled at the box office. It doesn't even look like the movie had much of a cult following, which fizzly coming-of-

age 80s movies often do once they hit the home video and cable circuit. Fortunately, it didn't seem to hurt anyone's careers, either. Dan Gordon wrote a few popular action films. Jeff Kanew went on to do *Troop Beverly Hills* (read about it in our January 2023 issue). Linda Fiorentino's next role was in Martin Scorsese's quirky *After Hours*. And Anthony Edwards grew a mustache for *Top Gun*.

Gotcha! is often credited as one of the earliest, if not first, mainstream depictions of paintball. (Kanew was an enthusiast at the time). Like *Cloak & Dagger*, *Gotcha!* also had a video game tie in, although the game followed the movie. LJM Games released *Gotcha! The Sport!*, a first-person capture-the-flag style pinball game that was played with the Zapper gun, in 1987 [5].

We note several ties to our Sports Issue [6]. First, *Gotcha!* opened in theaters on the same day as the gymnastics action film, *Gymkata*. *Gotcha!* is the second film that Linda Fiorentino appears in after making her debut in the high school wrestling drama, *Vision Quest*. And finally, the *Gotcha!* soundtrack includes Herbert Kah's excellent track, "Angel 07." You can hear his song, "Get Strange," on the *Rad* soundtrack.

Gotcha! is a hard movie to track down online, unless you don't mind watching it on Russian sites with annoying pop-ups or, for some reason, a Dutch porn website. At least the movie is available on DVD for you morbidly curious folks.



MR. GREEN, WITH THE WRENCH, IN THE LIBRARY: CLUE

BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

Clue the movie is based on the popular Hasbro board game of the same name. It's a funny, manic, whodunit with a good deal of slapstick comedy and quick, quotable dialogue. I love this movie, and I forgot how much I love this movie until I watched it again. The performances are great, the aesthetic is lovely, and the writing is very funny. And, as I was doing research for this essay, I kept thinking about how this whole project was born out of a board game that had absolutely no backstory to it. What a strange way to make a movie.

Clue got its start when Hollywood producer Debra Hill secured the rights and approached John Landis (*The Blues Brothers*, *Animal House*) about directing the movie. Landis had sketched out the basic plot, but he realized he didn't know how to resolve it. So, in an attempt to hire a "real writer" he reached out to Tom Stoppard (who sim-

ply gave up) and Steven Sondheim (who was too expensive), but Landis eventually ended up contacting Jonathan Lynn (*My Cousin Vinny*). Lynn originally didn't think there was much of a story (because it's just a board game), but he spent 6 months crafting the plot. However, by the time he was done, Landis signed on to direct *Spies Like Us*, so Landis asked Lynn to direct it himself [1].

When Lynn set out to cast the movie, he originally wanted Leonard Rossiter to play Wadsworth, but Rossiter died suddenly before rehearsals started. Lynn then wanted to cast Rowan Atkinson (pre-Mr. Bean), but the studio wasn't interested. Finally, Lynn settled on Tim Curry (a childhood friend of his), who was already known for his role in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. For the part of Miss Scarlett, Lynn had originally cast Carrie Fisher. However, Fisher had to go to rehab shortly before rehearsals started, which is how Lesley

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MR.
GREEN,
WITH THE
KNIFE,
IN THE
KITCHEN.



Ann Warren ended up in the role. The remainder of the cast was made up of Lynn's first choice actors: Martin Mull, Christopher Lloyd, Madeline Kahn, and Michael McKean [2].

With the cast in place, they began filming, and, by all accounts, they enjoyed their time working on this movie. Martin Mull said, "There were an awful lot of instances where it was impossible to keep a straight face. In fact, we were laughing so much, one thing that has stayed indelible in my mind is before every take of every scene, Michael McKean would say to everyone in the cast, 'Something terrible has happened here,' to try to bring us back to the reality of where we were. It got to be quite a funny little catchphrase" [3].

The plot for *Clue* isn't too complicated. Set sometime in 1954 in New England, six strangers receive invitations to a fancy dinner at a huge mansion. Upon arriving at the mansion, they are greeted by the butler, Wadsworth (Tim Curry) and told not to reveal their real name or any information that could identify them. They are all given aliases: Professor Plum (Christopher Lloyd), Colonel Mustard (Martin Mull), Mr. Green (Michael McKean), Miss Scarlett (Lesley Ann Warren), Mrs. White (Madeline Kahn), and Mrs. Peacock (Eileen Brennan). None of them know why they were invited to this dinner, and they are all locked in the mansion with no way out.

During dinner, the seventh guest, Mr. Boddy (Lee Ving) arrives. Wadsworth eventually reveals that they are all being blackmailed by Mr. Boddy,

but Mr. Boddy has a proposition for them. He presents them all with a weapon (a candlestick, a knife, a lead pipe, a revolver, a rope, and a wrench), which Mr. Boddy says they can use to kill Wadsworth because he has the key to the front door. Once Wadsworth is dead, they can unlock the door and leave and all of their secrets will remain unknown. Mr. Boddy turns off the lights and we hear the sounds of someone getting hit and then the gun goes off. When the lights come back on, Mr. Boddy is dead on the floor and everyone is wondering who killed him. As the movie goes on, more dead bodies turn up and the dinner guests try to figure out who did it.

This movie is filled with slapstick humor and silly, fun dialogue. I was surprised to learn that Lynn would not let the actors improvise, which seems crazy to me. Mull said, "Jonathan is a by-the-book guy, and if it was written, that was the way we did it. For Madeline [Kahn], of course, that's like telling Cicero not to speak, you know what I mean?" [4]. Mull is right, at this point in her career, Khan had already found comedic success in movies like *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein*. She was so funny in everything she did, and *Clue* was no exception.

It turns out that the only improvised lines were Kahn's "flames on the side of my face speech" (arguably the most famous lines from the movie). She's describing how much she hated Yvette (the maid) for having an affair with her husband. McKean said, "She just kind of went into a fugue about hatred. She did it three or four times, and

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MRS.
WHITE,
WITH THE
ROPE,
IN THE
LIBRARY.



each time was funnier than the last.” Curry added, “I think Jonathan [Lynn] was very uncertain about it. It was very very funny, and hard not to laugh. Flames!” [5].

What wasn’t improvised from the start was *Clue*’s three different endings. Wadsworths spends the final act of the movie explaining how the murderer killed everyone, but we see three different possible endings with different murderers each time (as if we’re playing the game over and over). Landis’s original sketch of the plot included different conclusions. Apparently, there was also a fourth ending, which Lynn says he can’t remember, but the Internet says that the fourth ending involved Wadsworth committing all the murders. Curry remembers an ending in which Wadsworth kills everyone, but, he says, “They thought it was too obvious that the butler did it.” McKean says he remembers “most of the cast... being chased by Dobermans,” but he can’t remember if they even finished shooting it [6].

When *Clue* was released in theaters, the different endings played in different theaters (and depending on which you saw you might have missed Mrs. White’s “Flames” speech). Theatergoers were confused about which ending to see, so people just didn’t go see it [7]. Lynn said, “It was a big mistake to release it with separate endings because you only get the pleasure out of all the different endings if you see them all” [8].

Roger Ebert agreed with Lynn in his review, which was not favorable. He said, “I was informed that

the newspaper ads for the movie will contain the letters A, B, or C, denoting which ending is being shown at which theater. I was then told which ending each of those three letters stands for. On the basis of my information, ending A is the one to go for - more fun, more satisfying. But then at the last minute Paramount called back to say they “weren’t sure” whether they were right about which endings corresponded with which letters” [9]. So, in the end, no one knew which ending was “the good one.”

With the bungled marketing and poor reviews, *Clue* only made \$14.6 million of its \$15 million budget [10]. However, *Clue* caught on with viewers on cable, where it played with all three endings, and quickly became a cult favorite. Lloyd, Warren, McKean, Curry, and Lynn all remark that fans always want to talk about this movie. And the fans should talk about it because it’s a great movie. It had been a while since I had watched the entire thing, and I forgot just how quick and funny it is. You should watch it. And, when you do, keep an eye out for a quick cameo by Go-Go’s guitarist Jane Wiedlin (spoiler alert, this is a murder mystery, so she doesn’t last long).

As with most movies we write about, there is talk of a reboot. Google tells me both Jason Bateman and Ryan Reynolds are attached to the project, but who knows if it will actually come to fruition. I hope it doesn’t. The original version of this movie will always be the best.



A GRAVEYARD BASH: NIGHT OF THE DEMONS

BY DR. RHONDA BAUGHMAN

Life is a game that one plays according to the rules. – Catcher in the Rye

This is the game that moves as you play ... - X

It's all fun and games until someone gets hurt, I hear, or in the case of director Kevin S. Tenney's *Night of the Demons* (1988), it's all naughty carousing and frisky party games in the dark until teens summon demons voiced by the hot James W. Quinn, oh, but even then, there's still good times to be had even when the demons show up. Prior to my initial viewing of the "I want to play a game" nuttery of *Saw* (2004) and before I caught (and psychically trembled before) both 1997 offerings *Funny Games* and *The Game* [1], I thought games were relegated to keeping children busy. If it wasn't a literal board or card game in question, then a game was merely something to do at a party to create atmosphere: spin the bottle,

charades, or hide and seek.

Although once initiated into late adolescence, then entrenched into corporate America I realized *anything* could be a game: reflecting on the games people play is a national pastime. As much as I enjoy many games, nothing triggered my entanglement with the idea of play like a Ouija board. When I saw *Night of the Demons* for the first time, I understood clearly the next logical progression post-planchette – the séance – and *Demons* shows us what can come after the traditional séance.

The Scream Factory DVD/Blu-ray collector's edition release of *Night of the Demons* is brimming with extras that all fans of the era can enjoy – a more innocent time where director Tenney, Scream Queen Linnea Quigley, and special FX (no CGI) maestro Steve Johnson reigned supreme. And what loyal fan doesn't remember *Demons'* legend-



ary lipstick through the breast effect [2] that would bring theater audiences to their feet, home video audience hitting rewind and pause, and even bring Quigley and Johnson together briefly in marriage?

The film's original title, *Halloween Party*, was nixed for fear of litigation threats and frankly, the change worked in everyone's favor, creating both a more electrifying title for marketing *and* creating a need to replace previously shot opening credits. The opening title sequence is iconic now, well ahead of its time in 1988. Listen closely to the "You're Invited Making of" featurette: there were Disney animators within the *Demons* ranks – hardcore talent in the cast *and* crew.

Tension between crew was acknowledged within that same "Making of" featurette, but even so, many of the top crew interviewed (director, producer, for example) confessed that it was *Demons* writer Joe Augustyn whose input and dialogue elevated the film, and it was Augustyn who really advocated for the various talent who needed to be hired to bring that epochal title sequence alive. As a repeated viewer, I see those Halloween archetypes flying across the screen and I'm excited, ready to party like it's 1988 again.

Demons opens with several groups of friends and an outlier all heading to Angela's [3] (Amelia 'Mimi' Kinkade) party: it is Halloween, after all, so for these teens it's time to booze up, hook up, and let loose at an abandoned funeral parlor, that's next to a cemetery, which is surrounded by a gigantic brick wall covered in barbed wire that marks an underground stream, because supposedly "evil spirits can't cross over running water – or something" the

Max character (Philip Tanzini) says vaguely. Max is Awkward Exposition Man and *Demons*' forward momentum halts when he tells a story [4], but it's his windy tale to his girlfriend Frannie (Jill Terashita) and their friends, couple Judy (Cathy Podewell) and Jay (Lance Fenton), that lets the viewer know madness is imminent: "Old Man Hull loved his clientele in the carnal sense" and on a long ago Halloween night, the Hull fam was slaughtered, the maid roasted, the killer suiciding, but no one really knows: "too much blood and guts."

Party crasher Sal (William Gallo) is already inside Hull House. Suzanne (Quigley) and Angela arrive shortly thereafter, having picked up Stooze (Hal Havins), Roger (Alvin Alexis), and Helen (Allison Barron) who have been stuck roadside with a flat sans tire iron. Stooze's hearty battle cry of "Let's Part-eeeeee!" seems to get the night underway with dancing, music [5], booze, fire, snacks, and a strobe light—sadly, the boom box batteries are a bust.

Not to worry! Angela [6] announces it's "time for party games" and the lame joke is made that they can play "post orifice" and she can be the stamp (1988 was a time stamps had to be licked of course). I explained this dated joke to my quiz-zical viewing companion – and another joke five minutes later – both from Stooze who got much of the best dialogue [7]. Angela wants a game in tune with the holiday, but "bobbing for apples with razor blades in them" is quickly ruled out, although it is foreshadowing [8]. However, a second, equally dangerous choice wins: the séance.



Unlike Tenney's more dramatic film *Witchboard* (1986), where a Ouija board brings out the nastier side of the hereafter, a mirror is the catalyst for the spirit gateway in *Demons*. Frannie suggests a "past life séance" where the teens "sit around and look in a mirror and see [their] past lives." Stooze aptly asks: "What kind of drugs are we gonna need for this," and Havins delivering this line *never* fails to make me smile. Angela leads the charge, telling the group, as they're seated in front of the mirror with a single candle in front of it, to stare at her reflection until the glass clouds up all black, and when it clears, everyone can see what she looked like in a past life. Only Roger stands apart from the group, not only as the only African American in the cast, yes, but the only member choosing wisely to avoid the mirror. Roger tells them his "daddy was a preacher" and he "knows better than to be messing with this stuff. This is a house of the dead."

Confirming Roger's theory are three loud bangs from somewhere in the bowels of Hull House! The camera pans to the basement, accompanied by sounds of grinding metal. Then finally, another shot of the demonic creature Helen first spotted in the mirror as its essence escapes from the on-site crematorium, its vocal effects provided by James W. Quinn [9]. Suzanne soon is the first to inhale demon sauce, with Angela quickly behind. Couples pair off and viewers endure yet another Max yarn, *this time* exclaiming how the land Hull House is built upon is unclean, ancient cultures and native tribes altogether avoided the Hull House side of the underground stream.

I can appreciate the writer throwing in lots of levels, but it's like no one could pick just one legend/

folk aspect to focus on: couple this with the fact Judy's costume is an *Alice in Wonderland* dress, what we have now is a get-out-of-a-cohesive-narrative free card – multiple reasons could be attributed to the Hull House horrors, or none at all. The demon makeup FX for Stooze, Suzanne, and Angela morphs, becomes intense and uglier as the film progresses – more kudos to Steve Johnson's abilities – this movie is his as much as it is anyone else's.

What sets this movie apart from other "Oops, we summoned a demon at our party" fare isn't the two sequels spawned in 1994 and 1997, nor the mediocre remake in 2009 (and as much as I loved the poster art and box cover art, that's not it either). The writing, FX, and cinematography are important, but what truly make this film work is the passionate sincerity of it all – the genuine desire to make a fantastic, memorable film – and talent flooded this film like I suspect so much booze did the set, and that's cool since the film has aged like a fine wine.

I adored listening to the cast reminisce about their auditions and the time spent together on set. Most importantly, I felt a warm, heady shot of nostalgia when I listened to William Gallo say, "it was just a big party." 'Party' wasn't just a word that appeared in the original title – the *Demons* shoot was declared by many as a magical time, and everyone lived together in a downtown LA house to create a masterpiece [10]. Even 30+ years later, fans like me watch this film at times other than Halloween to re-capture some of that magical 1988 demon memory dust.



NINTENDO (MARKETING) POWER: THE WIZARD

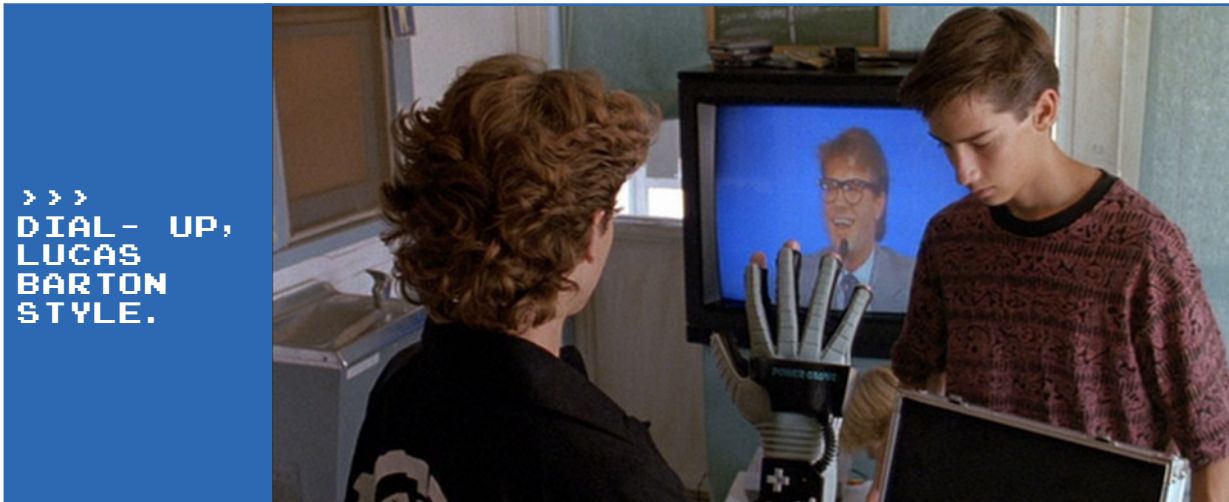
BY JANENE SCELZA & MATT SCELZA

Cloak & Dagger hyped a video game, but *The Wizard* hyped an entire brand, console, games, and all. Sure, the 1989 kiddie adventure film was meant to be the big public unveiling of Nintendo's third (and best) installment of the *Super Mario Bros.* NES franchise, but the people in this film seem to generally have Nintendo Madness. It's all Nintendo all the time.

Elderly businessmen hit the cafe arcade on their lunch breaks and make wagers with little kids about who can score higher on *Double Dragon*. Christian Slater brings his Nintendo on a road trip to stave off boredom (Gameboy was only just released in North America). Numerous NES games and tech (Power Glove) are prominently featured. Youngsters get their news from *Nintendo Power* magazine ("Now you're playing with power!"). And Nintendo reps with giant binders help stuck players at 1-900 call rates (how deceptively cool that job seemed when we were kids).

Crass commercialism, particularly in kids programming, doesn't tend to sit well with audiences, and that might be part of the reason for more negative reviews over the years, although the movie still has a healthy cult following. Yes, *The Wizard* was *The Nintendo* movie in the same way that, for example, we laugh at *Mac & Me* (1988) for blatantly slinging McDonalds and Pepsi. And that commercialism was, according to director Todd Holland, even more jarring when the movie was released [1].

It could have been a lot worse. Universal Pictures was perfectly willing to phone everything in, banking on Fred Savage + Nintendo, Nintendo, Nintendo! to net a generous sum from a bunch of dumb kids. (In the words of Stephanie Tanner: "How rude!"). Holland, who Universal reluctantly hired to direct, suggested that they do more than "preach to the converted" and make *The Wizard* exciting for everyone. He wound up fighting the



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DIAL-UP,
LUCAS
BARTON
STYLE.

studio tooth and nail to make the movie make sense. It reportedly got ugly [2].

We didn't discover *The Wizard* until it hit the shelves of the Phar-Mor store (an 80s chain with a sordid history [3]) where we regularly rented movies and Nintendo games on Saturday mornings. We were 10 and under, and like most American kids at the time, we were hooked on Nintendo, so this movie was right up our alley. It has an unsupervised group of young friends stake out on adventure. The kids (mostly) feel like real kids rather than studio script bots. The movie is funny and a bit touching. There's inklings of pre-teen romance. Some of the movie takes place in the 1980s Cinematic Promiseland (California). It had some of that white, middle class late 80s pre-teen coolness (Vision Street Wear and New Kids on the Block). And of course, there was lots and lots of Nintendo. We watched the movie *ad nauseam*.

The Wizard follows a trio of kids as they hitch their way from Utah to California, where the youngest, a mute video game prodigy named Jimmy (Luke Edwards) will compete in Video Armageddon. Jimmy's origin story is a bit grim. He witnessed the drowning death of his twin sister. His parents divorced. Jimmy stopped talking. He carries a lunchbox memorial, is good at video games (heroism by proxy?), and has this unrelenting desire to go to California.

Therapy doesn't seem to be working, so Jimmy's mother and awful stepfather (Sam MacMurray) decide to put him in an assisted care facility. Jimmy's step brother Corey (Fred Savage), likewise

dealing with his own family problems -- a socially inept father (Beau Bridges) and brother (Christian Slater) -- is eager for escape and decides to bust Jimmy out and help him get to California.

The boys are woefully light on supplies and money for the trip. They also don't seem to have much of a plan about what to do in California until they meet Haley (Jenny Lewis), a smooth-talking drifter. She tells them about Video Armageddon and makes a deal with Corey to split the prize money if she can help get them there. Haley is a tad older and is quite resourceful, having spent time on the road with her absentee trucker dad (notice a pattern?).

To earn cash, the kids hustle overconfident players in small town arcades who are sure Jimmy is no match for them. No one can beat Jimmy... except maybe Lucas (Jackey Vinson), who is reportedly "awesome" and owns all 97 games. (We wonder: would this indiscriminate collector eventually add the dorky Wisdom Tree games to his collection?) Lucas is the only one who intimidates Jimmy, and when he hears that Jimmy is going to Video Armageddon, he decides that he's going. Look for a young, mulleted Tobey Maguire among his goons. (Did Lucas's mom drive them all to California? Or does he have bully contacts there?)

Meanwhile, the kids are unknowingly trailed by a dufus private investigator named Putnam (Will Seltzer), who was hired by Jimmy's stepdad, and Corey's dad and brother (who bond over Nintendo, as God intended), who hope to reach the boys before Putnam does. We get slapstick moments



where the parties try to impede the others' progress ala *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Eventually, Jimmy's mom and stepdad join the convoy, having lost faith in Putnam.

Jimmy, Corey, and Haley hitch rides with biker gangs (as Real Life's cool track, "Send Me an Angel" plays) and trucker friends (the wonderful Frank McRae), and sleep in junkyards when the money is good, and casino hotels when the money is bad. Roger Ebert was pretty hung up in his review about how far fetched all of this was (getting robbed twice and coming out unscathed is as bad as it gets).

Sure, Mr. Ebert, it's totally idiotic to think these kids could manage that, but can't we expect a fair bit of artistic license for a kid's adventure movie, particularly the ones from the 1980s? We had kids discovering pirate ships in the sewers (*The Goonies*) and building working spaceships in the woods (*Explorers*) and disappearing into storybooks while affecting the real world (*Neverending Story*). *The Wizard* can get a pass, too.

The various parties all collide at the Big X... Video Armageddon, which gave the public a better-than-average sneak peak at the new *Mario* game. Jimmy, Lucas, and a nameless other finalist stare intently at jumbotrons and nervously flail controllers about as they race to reach the highest level on a game none of them have played before. The players suspiciously know where warp tunnels, extra lives, and the like are hidden — talk about artistic license! Of course, we understand that this was one way to get the secrets out to all

those kiddies who, like us, really wanted to play the game after seeing it in this movie.

You know who's going to win. However, *The Wizard* doesn't end when the contest does. The families need to sort out their problems, which they tearfully do (with Haley in tow) at the wonderful Cabazon Dinosaurs roadside attraction. You might remember these from *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* (1985). It's a nice little ending, and the one Holland really fought for; Universal was basically OK with saying the video contest cured Jimmy. *Ugh...*

The movie was a modest box office hit when it debuted in theaters in December, 1989. (Holland called it a "huge bomb"). In retrospect, it was a great period for 80s movies. We're talking *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, *Little Mermaid*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Back to the Future II*, *Parenthood* and load of other classics sharing the marquee in December '89.

Some parts of *The Wizard* are laughable to us now, notably, the pre-teen swagger and Lucas Barton professing his love for the Power Glove in the most *fellow kids* line of dialogue. Some things also raise eyebrows now, like the inherent ickiness of unsupervised cherubic kids hitchhiking across state lines. But, for us, *The Wizard* still holds up, and leaves us instantly nostalgic for simpler times spent playing Nintendo together until our grandmother yelled from the other room to "Turn off that Intendo and go outside!"



ENDNOTES

END OF LINE: TRON

Release Date: July 9, 1982
Written by: Steven Lisberger
Directed by: Steven Lisberger
Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

- [1] "Tron" (Wikipedia), <https://tinyurl.com/zfruuuj6>
- [2] "Tron: a Retrospective" (The DisInsider, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/3b8ffsvf>
- [3] "Tron" (Wikipedia), <https://tinyurl.com/zfruuuj6>
- [4] "Why was Tron Ahead of its Time?" (Den of Geek, 2011), <https://tinyurl.com/4dtfa2k6>
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] "Tron" (Wikipedia), <https://tinyurl.com/zfruuuj6>

SHALL WE PLAY A GAME? WARSGAMES

Release Date: June 3, 1983
Written by: Lawrence Lasker and Walter F. Parkes
Directed by: John Badham

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

- [1] "WarGames" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/mwa98abc>
- [2] "WarGames: A Look Back at the Film That Turned Geeks and Phreaks Into Stars" (Wired, 2008) <https://tinyurl.com/yc7m56rd>
- [3] Ibid.
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] "Dark Territory review – how WarGames and Reagan shaped US cyberwar battle" (The Guardian, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/yckhvacf>
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] "WarGames" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/mwa98abc>
- [9] "Computer Fraud and Abuse Act" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/mvx6bunx>
- [10] "WarGames" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/mwa98abc>

ENDNOTES (CONT'D)

TV CASUALTIES: ENDGAME

Released: 1983
Written by: Joe D'Amato, Aldo Florio
Directed by: Joe D'Amato
Essay by: Noah Rymer

SPY GAMES: CLOAK AND DAGGER

Release date: July 13, 1984
Written by: Tom Holland (and story, with Cornell Woolrich)
Directed by: Richard Franklin
Essay by: Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

[1] The Atari 5200 version of Cloak & Dagger was never actually completed; dummy cartridges and gameplay from the arcade version were used in the film. "ATARI 5200 SUPERSYSTEM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS VERSION 3.3, CHAPTER 2.6: WHAT'S THE REAL STORY BEHIND CLOAK AND DAGGER?" (atarihq.com, 2001) <https://tinyurl.com/f8ke97zh>

[2] "Cloak & Dagger (1984)" (AFI Catalog) <https://tinyurl.com/bduk3j6k>

[3] "THE SCREEN: 'DAGGER', SPY GAMES" (NY Times, 1984) <https://tinyurl.com/4ykk7aus>

[3] "All of Me (ABC Sunday at 9...)" (LA Times, 1987) <https://tinyurl.com/3ehd64ye>

[4] "Cloak & Dagger (1984) / Action-Adventure" (Qwipster, 2004) <https://tinyurl.com/bdz2payv>

[5] "Cloak & Dagger (1984)" (r/movies discussion on Reddit, 2022) <https://tinyurl.com/mr28jfua>

[6] "Tom Holland Wants a Cloak and Dagger Re-make [Exclusive]" (Movieweb, 2011) <https://tinyurl.com/bdhvf3rn>

[7] "Cloak & Dagger" (Mondo-Digital, 2022) <https://tinyurl.com/yc8fe77m>

YOU GOT SOME RED ON YOU: GOTCHA!

Release date: May 3, 1985
Screenplay by: Dan Gordon (also story, with Paul G. Hensler)
Director: Jeff Kanew
Essay by: Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

[1] "Students use new app to play campus-wide Assassin game" (The Chronicle, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/bdh46zkh>

[2] "Gotcha!" (Letterboxd) <https://tinyurl.com/2kjds2v>

[3] "Gotcha!" (Roger Ebert, 1985) <https://tinyurl.com/nzvsb9vv>

[4] "SpyMaster Interview #10 - Jeff Kanew" (Spy Hards Podcast, 2021) <https://tinyurl.com/36ryynzt>

[5] "Gotcha! The Sport!" (Giant Bomb) <https://tinyurl.com/4tw9e5c3>

[6] [PDF] Girls, on Film #2: The Sports Issue (2018) <https://tinyurl.com/5f98ce5e>

MR. GREEN, WITH THE WRENCH, IN THE LIBRARY: CLUE

Release Date: December 13, 1985
Written by: Jonathan Lynn and John Landis
Directed by: Jonathan Lynn
Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "The Crazy Story Of How 'Clue' Went From Forgotten Flop To Cult Triumph" (Buzzfeed, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/4t7v6494>

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

ENDNOTES (CONT'D)

- [7] "13 Mysterious Facts About Clue" (Mental Floss, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/3ax77ydz>
- [8] "The Crazy Story Of How 'Clue' Went From Forgotten Flop To Cult Triumph" (Buzzfeed, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/4t7v6494>
- [9] "Clue" (Roger Ebert, 1985) <https://tinyurl.com/2s3tpe4h>
- [10] "Clue (film)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/2waxdydz>

A GRAVEYARD BASH: NIGHT OF THE DEMONS

Release date: September 9, 1988
 Written by: Joe Augustyn
 Directed by: Kevin Tenney
 Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

- [1] Directors Michael Haneke and David Fincher, respectively
- [2] Watch the featurette "You're Invited: Making of Night of the Demons" for an in-depth explanation of this memorable effect! This special feature also explains the insane hours of makeup effects, as well as "blue boogers."
- [3] Technically, her pal Suzanne (Linnea Quigley) accompanies Angela and uses her bodacious bum to help hornswoggle some convenience store clerks out of store wares; moreover, Suzanne helps turn Angela into a demon, but let's face it: Angela is well on her way down to Demonic Avenue as a human – and the bulk of the initial party work (location, invites, snacks, theatrical party ensemble) are Angela's handiwork. The poster for Demons shows demon Angela holding her blood-signed invitation, and the tagline promotes it as Angela's party as well. The first sequel has some epic artwork and another party tagline focused on Angela. The second sequel's artwork was solid, but the tagline needed some work, although the first two films were legendary and a tough to follow.
- [4] I am jealous though – his infectious laugh and crisp articulation served him well – his IMDB lists numerous voice credits.
- [5] Music by the Tenney Brothers is worth the price

- of the DVD alone – "Computer Date" is hilarious and weirdly memorable.
- [6] Kinkade is truly frightening in some scenes and she was cast originally, indeed, to be scary. She's scary. H, but also scary.
- [7] The second joke needing explained: "If you believe that, I have a real nifty bridge to sell you." Also noteworthy: the featurette indicates where Havins' iconic line "eat a bowl of fuck" comes from. Lots of symbolism, as well as cultural and historical significance – more than one might think from campy teen horror/gore flick from '88 – but it's a cult classic for many reasons.
- [8] The Old Man/Harbinger of Doom archetype is the film's full circle moment for apples and razor blades.
- [9] Quinn is often recognized as the best bud in Tenney's Witchboard and the star of Tenney's underrated Witchtrap (1989). Don't blink in Demons and you can catch him as one of the hornswoggled convenience store clerks.
- [10] The actual Hull House you see from a distance in the film is a matte painting, and sadly, the actual house used, the one everyone stayed in is gone – now believed to be ... a Ralph's. I did find contact info for James W. Quinn but was too nervous to reach out for this essay. I always wonder when reaching out to my beloved film icons (when we're not at a convention) if they're sick of journalists like me asking about movies they did over 30 years ago. I will have to meet him face to face to establish a proper line of inquiry.

NINTENDO (MARKETING) POWER: THE WIZARD

Release date: December 15, 1989
 Written by: David Chisholm
 Directed by: Todd Holland
 Essay by: Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

- [1] " Todd Holland (The Wizard) – Interview" (Arcade Attack, 2019), <https://tinyurl.com/uejzy654>
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] "Phar Too Ambitious" (Tedium, 2021) <https://tinyurl.com/2p92dedb>

GAME OVER

GIRLSONFILMZINE.COM