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Shame, to be published in September 2002.  
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# REEL SHAME

**Bad Movies and the  
Hollywood Stars Who  
Made Them**

***Scott Hamilton & Christopher Holland***

*with a foreword by Freeman "Dr. Freex" Williams*

**A Stomp Tokyo Book**

*Reel Shame: Bad Movies and the Hollywood Stars Who Made Them*

by Christopher Holland and Scott Hamilton

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Christopher Holland lovingly dedicates this book to his family: Rob, Lynn, Geoffrey, Nicholas, Benjamin, Pamela, and Christina. Without you I would never be weird enough to write a book like this.

Scott Hamilton dedicates this book "to Amy, and all the movies (good or bad) that have inspired me."



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# Foreword

by Freeman “Dr. Freex” Williams

At one point in my critical career, I stated that it should be a law – or at least, an ironclad tradition – that every big-time big-name actor or actress must start out in a skeezy little movie with a budget of \$1.98. To be sure, I was referring to Frank Bonner, whose major contribution to culture has been the unctuous Herb Tarlek in *WKRP in Cincinnati*, but the point remains the same for actors of a higher visibility and/or income.

To come from humble beginnings is one of the ways we judge the character of our public figures. The stirring rags-to-riches story has long been a staple of English literature. To see a movie star disembark from a limousine onto a glamorous red carpet, waving to the cheering schlubs held in check by velvet rope, is to taste from the heady vineyards of fame; to see that same star laboring in a no-budget clunker (possibly under a different name) is to realize that the glittering creature in the formal attire is no different from the cheering schlubs, or you or I. They were once looking for a job, that first entrance into a career, and they took that crummy job washing dishes in the back room of a Denny’s.

The difference is: their back rooms are available on video.

Then there is the opposite side of that coin: the once-viable actor or actress who has fallen from grace, either through age, individual peccadilloes, or simple bad luck. It is harrowingly clear in these instances that all notions of art or craft have gone out the nearest window in favor of that most essential of commodities, the paycheck. Once again, we find ourselves sharing the same life as these luminous creatures: they too, have to pay rent or mortgages, and buy groceries.

And somewhere between the two sides of this increasingly thick metaphorical coin is the Unthinkable: the Big Budget Bad Movie

in which matinee idols willingly appear, producing an indelible and entertaining stain on their resumes. The poster child for this phenomenon is *Ishtar*, the yardstick for Overblown Bad Movies for more than a decade. While it did not end the careers of Dustin Hoffman or Warren Beatty, it possesses a dreadful half-life of its own; the fact that the troubled money pit *Waterworld* was mockingly referred to as “Fishtar” before its release attests to the staying power of a particularly bad film.

I can think of no better guides into this realm of cinematic desperation than Chris Holland and Scott Hamilton. Friends since before the Crimean War, these two men devour movies like rubber-suited monsters consume unsuspecting cities. Their viewing habits are not constrained by mere notions of genre or nationality; just when you think you have their viewing habits figured out, they will begin ranting about the musical numbers in Indian pictures or discussing the relative merits of Pia Zadora versus Maria Ford.

This omnivorous appetite for offbeat cinema of all flavors begat a thriving empire, Stomp Tokyo ([www.stomptokyo.com](http://www.stomptokyo.com)), wherein they expound upon their various cinematic findings. Whereas many movie critics eventually become jaded, grumbling misanthropes under the sheer weight of the product unspooling before them, Scott and Chris still carry with them a love for the art form that is contagious. If a high-profile big-budget picture is particularly horrid, they will tell you that; but if an impoverished, badly-shot little mongrel of a movie has some entertainment value, they’ll tell you that, too. They’re trustworthy that way.

And so, my little Dante, I must now entrust you to your twin Platons, that you may wander the netherworld of Movies That Stars Would Prefer You Forget. And if, in the future, you find yourself watching re-runs of *Mad About You* and find yourself thinking, “Tim Thomerson was a much better match for Helen Hunt than Paul Reiser,” well, is that such a bad thing?

*Freeman Williams is also known as Dr. Freex, creator of The Bad Movie Report ([www.badmoviereport.com](http://www.badmoviereport.com)). He wrote and appeared in a movie called **Forever Evil**, which is available in the back rooms of video stores everywhere.*

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# **PART ONE**

## **You Gotta Start Somewhere**

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## “You Gotta Start Somewhere”

Watching the early work of nearly any movie star underscores the differences between the type of person who becomes an actor and just about anyone else. When given the opportunity to be the butt of repeated jokes, dispense with one’s modesty, and face certain humiliation which will be recorded and played back for the amusement of others, most people will politely decline. Aspiring actors not only seek out this sort of abuse, they return for multiple helpings. This is called “breaking into the business.” It is the sort of treatment that inspires lawsuits in other professions, but in Hollywood it is an accepted ritual, a sort of fraternity hazing to which young would-be stars subject themselves in the hopes of earning more respectable roles. The logic of this is hazy at best (“Look at that young man stick his head in that toilet! I wonder if he’s available to play Hamlet?”), but the system seems to work. Even the most respectable and dignified actors working today have at least one skeleton lurking in their cinematic closets, and it doesn’t stop any of them from winning Oscars or making millions of dollars per picture.

One happy result of this system is that every rising star faces a moment on a TV talk show during which the host will grin mischievously before showing a particularly heinous clip from the actor’s past. We like to think that this teaches humility, but more likely it merely affords viewers the opportunity for a good laugh. Another fortunate consequence is that those of us who have acquired a taste for such detractive evidence of celebrity origins will never run out of entertainment.

In the 1952 musical *Singin’ in the Rain*, Gene Kelly’s character, Don Lockwood, regales the attendees of a ‘20s film premiere with the story of his rise to fame. The watchword he and his stage partner used was: “Dignity. *Always* dignity.” As he reveals the proud details of their

success story, the film shows us that their actual beginnings involved small-town vaudeville theaters, goofball slapstick stage antics, and repeated physical abuse as stunt doubles in budget Western movies. Don Lockwood never had to contend with video, which has laid bare the goofball antics of our modern stars and revealed just how little dignity has to do with any nascent movie career.

In this chapter, we present to you some of the most wretched examples of Hollywood careers being born. Since their lowly beginnings, some of these actors have produced the most popular and profitable movies ever made. Some of them have become the stars who are merely famous for being famous. Others have seen their careers peak only to decline again, and still others have their best work ahead of them. All of them, however, began at the bottom – and none of them could ever stand in front of an audience to intone: “Dignity. *Always* dignity.”

# Girls Just Want to Have Fun

(1985, Director: Alan Metter)

Let us consider a trio of Hollywood actresses.

*Helen Hunt* is quite the veteran of b-movies, with three *Trancers* films to her credit. More recently, she endured the run of a sitcom with Paul Reiser, starred in a blockbuster disaster flick, and won Best Actress at the Academy Awards for portraying a woman of thirty-five who falls in love with a sixty year-old Jack Nicholson.

*Sarah Jessica Parker* – who once played the Squarest of Pegs, rubbed elbows with aliens in *Flight of the Navigator*, and brought new meaning to the word “flighty” in *L.A. Story* – now eats men alive as Manhattan’s sexiest journalist in HBO’s *Sex and the City*. How Matthew Broderick lucked into marrying this woman is one of life’s greatest mysteries.

*Shannen Doherty* was the bitch queen of teen prime-time drama and suffered death at the hands of Winona Ryder before floundering in a rash of trash flicks and TV movies, after which she redeemed herself by appearing in Kevin Smith’s *Mallrats*. Some folks just can’t get past her asymmetrical facial features, but her continued ability to get screen work means she must be doing something right.

What these disparate talents have in common, as you’ve likely guessed by now, is the 1985 “dance classic” movie *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*. For those of you fortunate enough not to have memories of the ‘80s, the film’s title comes from the first hit song of pop star Cyndi Lauper. But that’s about where the relationship ends; it’s not as if Lauper appears in the film, nor does the song have much of a plot to appropriate. Moreover, the song as used in the movie isn’t even Lauper’s version. As an unofficial web site for the film quips, the soundtrack is composed of “songs you know by artists you don’t know.” *Girls* came just at the time that *Footloose*’s soundtrack, full

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of pop hits performed by the original artists, was one of the best-selling albums on Billboard's charts, so this was probably one of the last movies to use this type of cheap, *faux*-hit music. Producers would soon figure out they could pay for needle-drop rights to actual pop songs and then make their money back on soundtrack albums.

The film itself is a bit like watching the Muppet Babies sequence from *The Muppets Take Manhattan*. All of the faces are familiar, but look! How cute and ridiculous they are! That the movie takes place in the '80s, surely the most amusing decade of the Twentieth century (especially when it comes to teen fashion), is but icing on this most cheesy of cakes. First from our trio of actresses to appear is Janey Glenn (Parker), who hiccups her way through her introductory speech at her new Catholic girls' school in Chicago – the latest in a long line for this Army brat, although “the uniforms are always the same – even on Guam.”

When she mentions her love of dancing and her desire to be on *Dance TV* (a version of *Soul Train* for white kids which is, whudday-aknow, taped right there in Chicago), she endears herself to Lynne (Hunt), who functions as the wacky, rebellious catalyst figure for Janey's pent-up passions. No, not *those* kinds of passions! Lynne talks Janey into entering the big *Dance TV* contest, during which a pair of new *Dance TV* regulars will be chosen. She also shows Janey her inimitable babysitting style, which involves placing the baby in the center of a pizza, but this detail is less crucial to the plot.

Meanwhile, a similar scene is playing out across town between two teenaged boys. As Jeff (Lee Montgomery, something of a teen screen fixture in the '70s and '80s) and his pal Drew (a squeaky-voiced Jonathan Silverman!) shoot hoops in Jeff's driveway, Drew unveils his plan to enter Jeff into the contest and make money selling bootleg *Dance TV* merchandise. You'll want to watch closely here folks, because Shannen Doherty makes her entrance as Jeff's sister Maggie, who has a hopeless crush on Drew. Why? We don't know. *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* is full of little mysteries.

Janey feels that her life is turning around. Inspired by Lynne's encouraging words, she gushes to her parents, “I have a best friend for the first time!” Janey honey, your best friend is Helen Hunt.

You've been screwed. Of course, later in life Parker will start hanging out with Kim Cattrall, so we suppose all these things are relative. So inspired is Janey that she actually attends the first round of the *Dance TV* competition and is selected as a finalist! And the hunky Jeff is selected as her partner! Oh, God! We're so *happy* for her!

Uh, we mean . . . *Lynne* is so happy for her. Lynne herself was rubbed out of the competition by an inconsiderate dance partner who stomped her leg – an “accident” which, it is later discovered, was engineered by the evil Natalie Sands, rich bitch and aspiring *Dance TV* regular. Lynne also had two other strikes against her, namely that she was wearing a big stuffed grasshopper on her hat, and she doesn't have Janey's ability to replace herself with a trained dancer in long shots.

Naturally, Jeff and Janey will go on to win the *Dance TV* spots, but only after their different backgrounds tear them apart, and then they realize they love each other, etc. and so on. *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* proudly declares itself an '80s movie by also including a scene in which the terrible trio of girls arrange for Natalie's very upscale coming-out party to be crashed by refugees from Billy Idol's backup band. And what '80s movie would be complete without the working-class dad who's sensitive to how much his son's dreams mean to him? Sometimes we just sit around feeling happy about the many years separating us from that decade.

If, unlike us, you have some twisted fascination with the ten years that brought us leg warmers and President Reagan, you'll probably enjoy the film a bit more than we did. With the exception of Michael Jackson's fashion and musical antics, *Girls* is crammed full of all the things that made the '80s unique: big hair, New Wave and punk rockers, and ALF! No, wait, we made up that last one. There's no ALF in this movie. Even if you're fairly neutral towards the '80s, you might get some sort of entertainment here, because at least it's got a beat you can dance to – even if the lead actors can't.

# Cutting Class

(1989, Director: Rospo Pallenberg)

*Cutting Class* asks us to believe that its good-girl heroine is so desirable that Roddy McDowall would make a fool of himself to catch a glimpse up her skirt. While McDowall (rest his soul) was never above making a fool of himself for several thousand dollars, you'll have to forgive us if we are skeptical at the sight of him playing a perverted heterosexual school principal in a genre-conforming high school slasher flick.

Enter Paula Carson (Jill Schoelen), the all-American schoolgirl. Her grades are good, she is admittedly quite cute, and she has Brad Pitt for a boyfriend. No kidding: Pitt (who even dated Schoelen briefly after the film was made) makes his "feature film" debut in *Cutting Class*, and it must have been before the acting lessons. Pitt's character Dwight is the bad boy to whom our good girl is inexplicably attracted. He drives a red convertible with reckless abandon, defies every form of authority, and even tries to make it with Paula. "Not until your grades improve," she tells him. That particular line of dialogue reveals Paula isn't really even that good of a girl; she just has her price. Wanna break into the school's student records, to which Paula somehow holds a key? It's gonna cost you that family ring of yours, buster.

What Paula doesn't know is that Dwight has a shadowy past, including some involvement with Brian Woods (Donovan Leitch Jr.), the creepy student who recently returned from a mental asylum, where he was committed after the mysterious death of his father. Although Paula's father, the local district attorney (Martin Mull), believes Brian intentionally cut the brakes on the car that killed the senior Woods, no evidence came to light. Brian was quietly shuffled off to the loony bin and has recently returned to school with the rest of the loonies – er, teenagers. Paula catches Brian's fancy, and the flirting begins, much to the distress of Dwight.

You probably don't need much help guessing what happens next: people begin to die mysteriously, and Brian is the prime suspect. Paula notices some odd behavior on Dwight's part, however, casting some suspicion on him as well. Is Brian the killer, or is Dwight trying to frame him for horning in on his girlfriend? Or is there some third party responsible for the mayhem?

Sadly, there are no surprises waiting for us in this dismal little movie. The writer picks one of the two prime suspects and goes with him as the killer, despite the availability of at least two other wacked-out characters in the film. We would have liked to see the custodian revealed as the killer, especially after his inspired delivery of the now-hackneyed "respect your high school janitor" speech.

**Shultz:** I'm the custodian of your f---ing destiny!

Instead, the killer is revealed to be one of the two boys, and Paula must join forces with the other to fight off the true madman. Here we get the other line of good dialogue, which is doled out like a precious gem: "I am a murderer! Not as prestigious as a lawyer or a doctor, but the hours are good!"

Thrown in with the main plot is the recurring subplot concerning the Odious Comic Relief™. Mull's character is ambushed while on a hunting trip and the film visits him periodically as he stumbles through the swamp, an arrow through his chest. While an arrow through Martin Mull's chest would normally qualify as a good start, here it merely gives him an excuse to gesticulate wildly and make stupid faces at the camera. We can only assume that psychotic killer standards are slipping, as any true nut-job would have finished the job properly.

The real letdown is that *Cutting Class* has no reason to exist. We've told you the only interesting lines in the film, and the acting isn't nearly good enough to make up for the rest of the script. For a horror flick it's remarkably unscary, and though the allegedly humorous appearances of a dying Martin Mull suggest *Cutting Class* might have been intended to be a comedy, there isn't much to laugh about in the film either. People of Hollywood: Please, please if you're going

to make a slasher flick, make sure you have either a funny script or a director adept at suspense! A lot of movies like this are made every year. Apparently there's a lot of cutting class in film school, too.

There's no mystery to the fact that so many horror films are set in high schools: film producers know that teenagers are the primary consumers of slasher flicks and have guessed, rightly, that these viewers would enjoy the sight of a psychopathic killer roaming the halls of a high school like the ones they see every day. Should the killer/beast/whatever actually be a high school student, so much the better.

In the 1950s and '60s, this meant a string of flicks that either combined *Rebel Without a Cause*-like teen angst with classic Universal horror traditions (*I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, *Blood of Dracula*) or pitted plucky young whitebread teens against monsters that threatened to eat their schoolmates (*Earth vs. the Spider*, *The Blob*).

In later decades, teens gained an appetite for gore that pushed aside psychological horror in favor of high body counts and unstoppable killers. Though this trend was arguably started by John Carpenter's *Halloween*, it's plain to see that horror movies concentrated more on splashing around buckets of fake blood than on atmosphere. Even initially imaginative film franchises like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* degenerated into "run and scream" stories featuring stars who weren't so much characters as potential victims.

Remaining at the centers of these movies were teenagers, who were naturally ignored when they tried to warn their elders against the onslaught of the latest bad guy. No wonder teenagers flock to these films: they're just like the hapless experiences of high school, except for the fact that the adults in such movies usually lay in bloody pieces at the end of ninety minutes. The first *Prom Night* even put a teenager in charge of dispensing mayhem, although by the end of the series (*Prom Night IV: Deliver Us from Evil*) the franchise hit rock bottom by discarding the prom portion of the plot!

Other teen horror flicks vacillated from peer-pressure-induced revenge horror (*Massacre at Central High*, *Slaughter High*) to supernatural monster movies (*Pumpkinhead II*, *The Addiction*) to campy horror "spoofs" like *Zombie High*. And let us not forget the rash of "self-aware" horror films in the '90s like *Scream*, which purported to deconstruct horror movie conventions even as the characters fell prey to them.

Teen horror films can recycle their ideas because their audiences grow up and are replaced by a new generation. As adults, such teens presumably go on to find things that are *really* scary – like Pia Zadora.

## The Lonely Lady

(1983, Director: Peter Sasdy)

One of us, who shall remain nameless, wanted to watch *The Lonely Lady* after seeing it nominated on an America Online message board as the worst film of all time. The other one of us, named Scott, thought this was a really bad idea. Nevertheless, we pressed onward, little knowing the doom fate held for us.

*The Lonely Lady* breaks all the rules of good filmmaking. It's based on a novel by Harold Robbins, it stars Pia Zadora, and it's about the lives of Hollywood creative types. These three elements, in combination, have been known to kill small dogs. Utterly predictable and painful, this is a film to inflict on your children as punishment.

We had a friend over the night we watched *The Lonely Lady*. Afterwards, she turned to us and said, "You know, I thought I knew what a bad film was, but this . . . I didn't know movies like this could exist!" We enjoy teaching our friends new things, but never so much as when those mental breakthroughs come after ninety minutes of non-stop exposure to Pia Zadora.

In essence, *The Lonely Lady* is the film upon which the infamously atrocious *Showgirls* was based, except that it shows more of the leading lady's life, both before and after the essential material presented in *Showgirls*.

Pia Zadora (the mind reels at the casting choices in this movie) plays Jerilee Randall, a simple schoolgirl living in San Fernando. She dreams of becoming a famous writer. While at a party, she meets the son of Walter Thornton, her favorite screenwriter. The young man invites her over to his house; she accepts, hoping to get a glimpse of her hero's home and working environment. They drive away with some other kids from the party, and that night she is assaulted by one of the son's friends, using what he finds easily at hand on the lawn. The "friend," played by Ray Liotta, is interrupted in his assault by the elder Thornton (played by Lloyd Bochner), who arrives in time

to save her from an even more disgusting fate.

Walter's rescue of Jerilee begins a friendship between the two, and before you know it, the two fall in love. (All together now: *ewwww!*) They marry. Their marriage falls apart when Jerilee's script rewrites actually improve one of Walter's screenplays and he feels belittled. Jerilee then goes through affair after sordid affair in her attempt to write her own screenplay and get it produced.

It is a very telling thing that copies of the novel *The Lonely Lady* published after the film's release do *not* use stills from the film on the cover to promote the book. Many other books do this: *Silence of the Lambs*, and *Jurassic Park*, for example. The difference is that *Silence of the Lambs* and *Jurassic Park* were two of the most successful book-to-film adaptations in history. *The Lonely Lady* is a film which most of its participants would probably like to forget. We wonder: if Ray Liotta were given a lifetime achievement award, would its presenters have the nerve to begin his film montage with a scene in which he molests Pia Zadora with a garden hose nozzle? Thoughts like these send us into mad fits of giggles, usually at the most inappropriate of times.

Despite her Golden Globe award for "Best New Actress" in the movie *Butterfly* (see sidebar for more), Pia's thespian talents are taxed beyond credibility here. As a matter of fact, the actress she reminds us of most is Kathy Ireland, whom the boys on *Mystery Science Theater 3000* described as being able to portray one emotion: dull surprise. Well, Pia was Kathy before Kathy. As Jerilee, Zadora gives dull surprise a workout you would not believe. The actor who got Jerilee pregnant refuses to have anything to do with her? Dull surprise. A weird Euro-trash couple proposition her sexually in exchange for producing her script? Dull surprise. A producer compares her script to her aborted pregnancy? *Dull surprise.*

On to the real pain this movie dishes out: skanky sex scenes. Tons of 'em. A plethora. A googol of them. It doesn't help that Jerilee seems to sleep with everyone in Hollywood, or that she's played by Pia Zadora. Or that she is supposed to be less than twenty years old. Every time she bumps uglies with some guy, something bad happens, as in the case of the producer who forces her to take drugs during

the act. You would think she'd learn. (Actually, you would think *we* would learn to stop picking films like this, but we digress.)

This movie was made with so little art, it almost made us cry. The actors stink. Scenes that are unpleasant in ways we can't describe are thrown on the screen for us to . . . what? Enjoy? Why was this film made? Why did we rent it? At one point during the screening, we were rendered physically unable to speak, let alone operate a remote control in order to turn the damn thing off. Trust us: Jerilee Randall is a lady who *deserves* to be lonely.

Although our practice thus far has been to include movies with actors who have a few good movies under their belts, we've singled Pia Zadora out as a paragon of bad acting. None of her other credits in a starring role have been worth the film they were printed on, despite the additional presence of supposedly credible actors. Pia's putrid freshman effort as an adult (in which she was joined by Orson Welles!), *Butterfly*, netted her a Golden Globe for Best New Star, thereby tarnishing the reputation of the Globes for more than a decade.

After *Butterfly* came *The Lonely Lady*, which won her more awards: a record ten "Razzie" awards, which are given the night of the Oscars for scurrilous cinematic achievements. The record was subsequently broken by *Showgirls*, which earned its eleventh Razzie for being the "Worst Remake" – of *The Lonely Lady*!

Also hot on *Butterfly's* heels was *Fake Out*, in which Zadora plays a Vegas showgirl who rats out her mobster boyfriend and falls under the protection of Telly Savalas and Desi Arnaz, Jr. This sucker nailed shut the coffin of Arnaz's cinematic career, but Pia went on to make *Pajama Tops* (a sex farce stage play on videotape) and *Voyage of the Rock Aliens* (an allegedly comedic rock musical) before her movie jobs dwindled to cameos and musical appearances.

To be fair, Zadora relaunched her singing career rather successfully, but she still found time to appear in movies like John Waters' *Hairspray* (undoubtedly her best work as the Beatnik Chick), *Naked Gun 33 1/3* (a memorable cameo in which she falls into a tuba), and *Troop Beverly Hills*, a frightening Shelley Long flick in which Pia appears as herself in a fashion show. Today, Zadora has forsaken a life in front of the camera for a life with her children, bringing her life around into a sort of full circle. Her very first movie role was at ten years old in the children's "classic" *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians*.

# Are You in the House Alone?

(1978, Director: Walter Grauman)

A warning right up front: Such is our disgust at this movie that we are going to spoil its only plot twist. So if you don't want to know, or if you're really offended by spoilers, skip to the next review.

We picked up *Are You in the House Alone?* in the horror section of a local video store. That classification turned out to be false advertising, because *Are You in the House Alone?* is not really a horror film. It plays more like a twisted ABC after-school special with a really disgusting moral.

*Are You in the House Alone?* was made for TV in 1978, which is pretty amazing considering the subject matter. The movie opens as young Gail (Kathleen Beller) is wheeled out of a house on a gurney. She has been raped, but she will not identify her attacker. "No! No one will believe me," she protests.

The movie then flashes back to the months before the rape, and we are made to see how this ugly scene came about. While trying to make it through the trials of everyday life as a high school student, Gail finds a threatening note stuck in her locker door. Up to this point it could be a slasher flick: a high school student stalked by a psycho. The movie follows standard protocol by introducing a round of suspects. Is it the swarthy, Harvey Keitel-ish ex-boyfriend who dumped Gail because she wouldn't sleep with him? Is it Steve (Scott Colomby), her new boyfriend? By far the creepiest candidate is Gail's photography teacher, who tells Gail that she needs to look "sexier" when she models for her self-portraits.

Meanwhile, Gail's home life is falling apart. Her mother (Blythe Danner) wants to return to her old job as a real estate agent, but dad argues vehemently against it. This plot thread is later magically resolved without the inclusion of the audience. Then dad loses *his* job

and spends his days boozing at a bar across the street from his office, without telling Gail. Why are we subjected to this? Apparently to pad the movie, because none of what happens at home has anything to do with what happens at school until the film finishes its flashbacks and we return to the present and learn the rapist's true identity.

Here comes that spoiler. The rapist turns out to be Phil, the well-to-do boyfriend of Gail's best friend, as played by Dennis Quaid. Quaid is appropriately revolting, so much so that we were amazed that of all the young actors here, he is the only one who went on to a successful career. What is it with teenaged actors who make their screen debuts as rapists? (If you've been skipping around the book, turn back to read about Ray Liotta and *The Lonely Lady*.)

The fact that Phil is Gail's best friend's boyfriend, of course, leads to all kinds of juicy character conflict. Gail has labeled Phil, the most eligible bachelor on campus and the son of a wealthy family, as a rapist. Here's where the movie starts to get really frustrating. Phil doesn't even try to deny he had sex with Gail. He claims it was consensual. Everyone believes him, apparently because Gail is known to have had sex with her boyfriend, Steve. So the moral is, "Don't have premarital sex, because if you're raped by a psycho, even one who leaves lots of evidence behind, beats you so badly you end up in the hospital, and even admits to having sex with you, no one will believe it was really rape because obviously you asked for it." The movie spends a little while drumming this moral into us, and then backs away from it by saying the real reason Phil won't be arrested is because his father is friends with a judge. So what, is this movie now trying to be a scathing indictment of the justice system? Or is it actually embarrassed by its own crudity?

In the real world, Phil would have denied any contact had ever happened and gotten himself a decent lawyer. In this TV movie, however, he provides Gail with ample opportunity to gather evidence that he is indeed a rapist. When Gail discovers that another girl in school is beginning to get the same notes, she sets up a trap using a Previously Mentioned Plot Device: her talent as a photographer. Using a timed shutter and rolls and rolls of film, Gail catches Phil in the act of leaving a note in the girl's locker. He then discovers

Gail's trap and proceeds to attack her, allowing plenty of time for the eyewitnesses to arrive. Roll credits.

The thing that most disgusted us about this film is the way the movie lingers over Gail's trauma, especially during the rape scene. We are spared nothing within the limits of television censorship, and the resulting emotional distress, while perhaps an accurate portrayal of the feelings of a rape victim, is stomach-turning to watch. Perhaps it hits a little too close to the mark, as if the director simply turned on the camera and said, "Okay, Dennis, now go *rape* her." Some things are better left off camera, especially since this scene brings nothing to the film but some tawdry shock value.

Our final complaint about *Are You In The House Alone?* is its billing as a horror film. Certainly, it uses horrific elements, but from the opening moments of the movie it is clear this is a rape drama, not a horror movie. For horror fans, especially those who would be treated to John Carpenter's *Halloween* that same year, it's like ordering a steak and being served tuna casserole.

One of the tricks of the horror and suspense movie trade is to attempt to creep out prospective viewers with the title alone. Thus have a number of films been saddled with titles that may or may not pertain to their content, but which include questions or oblique statements, usually posed by the killer/monster/villain to his/her/its victims.

Examples? You bet we got examples!

*I Know What You Did Last Summer* (and its sequel, *I Still Know...*)

*What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*

*What's the Matter with Helen?*

*Don't Go to Sleep*

*Don't Answer the Phone*

*Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*

*God Told Me To*

*Kill, Baby, Kill*

*Don't Go in the House*

*Tails You Live, Heads You're Dead*

*There's Nothing Out There*

*Don't Mess with My Sister!*

*Sorry, Wrong Number*

*Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*

*Let's Scare Jessica to Death*

# Tammy and the T-Rex

(1994, Director: Stewart Raffill)

We have heard that Denise Richards won't talk about *Tammy and the T-Rex*, her debut as a leading lady in a motion picture. Why won't she talk about it? It may have something to do with the fact that her character falls in love with a dinosaur – but don't worry, she loves him for his mind.

Denise plays high school cheerleader Tammy, which allows for an opening scene set during cheerleading practice, which in turn gives her a chance to display her acting assets. Tammy is in love with a football player named Michael (Paul Walker), though her gang-leading ex-boyfriend Billy (George Pilgrim) still stalks her. Tammy also has a male best friend, Byron (Theo Forsett), who is both black and gay – that's right folks, he's two, two, *two* stereotypes in one!

When Billy catches Michael and Tammy together, he does what any surly, jealous ex-boyfriend would do: he drags Michael off to the wild animal park and strands him in the vicinity of some hungry lions, where he is mauled, but not quite fatally. Hurriedly slapping on her sluttiest outfit, Tammy rushes to Michael's hospital bed, only to be greeted by a mad scientist, Dr. Wachenstein (Terry Kiser). Unbeknownst to Tammy, Wachenstein is experimenting with robot bodies and has decided that he wants to transplant Michael's brain into his newest experiment – a robot dinosaur. The next thing she knows, she's slapping on her second sluttiest outfit to rush to Michael's funeral.

Michael wakes up in his new body and, as would only be natural for someone in his position, he goes on a killing spree. This culminates in a party scene in which Michael goes to town on Billy's gang. Soon the killing grows old, so Michael kidnaps Tammy. Once Tammy figures out Michael has undergone the Godzilla treatment, the race is on to find Michael a new body so his brain can reside in

a receptacle more suited to loving Tammy in the way she needs to be loved. The balance of the film comprises many scenes in which Tammy and her T-Rex run from the evil doctor and/or the town's lone lawman. Incidentally, Sheriff Black happens to be Byron's father, thereby adding another stereotype to Byron's repertoire: the misunderstood son of the sheriff.

*Tammy and the T-Rex* is supposed to be madcap comedy, but the absence of drollery disqualifies it from the category. We're supposed to laugh at the shallowest stereotypes (Byron is effeminate and cowardly, Wachenstein is German and constantly exchanges double entendres with his assistant Helga) and low-rent pratfalls. Of course, the concept that Tammy might be sleeping with a dinosaur carries most of the "humor" during the film's last act. The only thing that's really funny is watching the film with the knowledge that Denise Richards would go on to be a star. The absurd ending carries no irony, and we suspect the film's original script had a different conclusion in mind for our star-cross'd lovers.

The movie is extremely low budget, so don't expect much in the way of dinosaur effects. The T-Rex is played by a full-sized prop most of the time, but it isn't a movie prop. It's one of those animatronic dinosaurs that show up periodically at science centers. As such, the T-Rex can't do much more than move its head a little. In that way, it's a lot like George Clooney playing Batman. In order to make the otherwise static dinosaur interact with the actors, some very unconvincing T-Rex gloves and boots are also used. It's a good thing, too – without those gloves, Mike's stubby little T-Rex arms would be too short to reach the telephone he uses shortly after his escape. Dinosaur lovers (who have already been spoiled by the glut of dino movies in recent years) will either sob in despair at the mistakes or have a great time picking the details apart.

Let's face it: the only reason anyone would watch this movie is because Denise Richards is in it. How does she acquit herself under these trying circumstances? Well, let's just say comedy has never been her *forte*. To make up for her lack of wit, the producers dress Richards up in some pretty funny outfits. Tammy can't afford to shop at Tramps-R-Us, so she goes to Sluts-B-Used. If this film were made in

the '80s, we could at least understand the sub-Madonna look, but this film was made in the '90s. People knew better by then. Didn't they?

Although this is far from the only black mark on Richards' cinematic resume (*Wild Things* and her unspectacular turn as a Bond girl in *The World Is Not Enough* come to mind), *Tammy and the T-Rex* inducts our young star into a more exclusive (if not quite honorable) club: people who made crappy dinosaur movies. Too many Hollywood personalities have made the mistake of thinking that the inclusion of dinosaurs will automatically make a movie a hot property.

Dinos have long been an attractor of small children, but Steven Spielberg upped the ante in 1993 with the release of *Jurassic Park*, a monolithic hit which has since spawned its own sequels, including the sub-par *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* and the more tolerable *Jurassic Park III*. Following the release of the initial movie, however, legions of adults suddenly recalled their own youthful infatuations with prehistoric monsters and studios scrambled to capitalize on the market.

Roger Corman's New Horizons company claimed to beat Spielberg to the punch by releasing *Carnosaur* two weeks earlier than *Jurassic Park*, but we're guessing the sting was somewhat alleviated by the fact that *JP* made 200 times as much money at the box office as did *Carnosaur*. Nonetheless, *Carnosaur* hatched two sequels of its own which aped better sci-fi movies (notably *Aliens*) and went straight to video.

Whoopi Goldberg stepped into the ring with the execrable "comedy" *Theodore Rex* (backed up by such notables as Juliet Landau, Carole Kane, and Bud Cort), and the sickly-sweet *Land Before Time* animated franchise got a kick in the tail with seven insipid sequels and counting – which is only appropriate, since they were made by Amblin Entertainment, one of Spielberg's pet film studios. Full Moon Entertainment insulted the world's intelligence with the *Prehysteria!* films, and of course no one can dispute the influence of *JP*'s velociraptors when watching the 1998 Hollywood incarnation of the biggest, baddest irradiated dinosaur of all: *Godzilla*.

Lest you think Spielberg began the dinosaur craze, however, let us point out the numerous dinosaur movies prior to 1993, including the original *King Kong* (remember the dinos in the jungle?) and a number of enjoyable Harryhausen flicks like *The Valley of Gwangi*. Here again, moviemakers repeatedly mistook the success of dinosaur stars as licenses to churn out crap, a statement quickly borne out by such catastrophes as *Baby* (1985), *Dinosaurus!* (1960), *King Dinosaur* (1955) and *The Lost Continent* (1951). Call it Tyrannosaurus Blecch.

## Cyborg 2

(1993, Director: Michael Schroeder)

We wonder how we will explain to future generations the nearly decade-long obsession America had with post-apocalyptic cyborg films. Does it really make sense to have cyborgs running around after the apocalypse? In most of these movies, running automobiles are rare. What are the chances that cyborgs could continue to operate under conditions that would destroy cars?

*Cyborg 2* begins with the obligatory title crawl (borrowed from *Blade Runner*, another 'bot-centered flick) which explains the futuristic world to us, freeing us from actual exposition within the movie. Our ears are assaulted with obtuse expository conversations anyway, because it's cheaper to have characters talk about events than it is to actually show them. In any case, the title crawl (read aloud by Jack Palance) informs us that this is a future in which corporations are paramount and "cyborgs have replaced humans in every respect, from the soldier in the field to the prostitute in the brothel." Because this is a b-movie, however, we know we are only going to see soldiers and prostitutes. Post-apocalyptic cyborg movies rarely feature people from other professions in significant roles.

The movie then moves to a board meeting at Pinwheel Robotics, a top supplier of cyborgs, right after Spacely Sprockets and Cogswell's Cogs. The executives watch a man and woman have sex and, at the height of passion, the woman explodes. Beyond being the screenwriter's fantasy, this is supposed to be a demonstration of "glass shadow," a liquid explosive that can be injected into a cyborg then detonated at any time. The head of Pinwheel, Martin Dunn (Allen Garfield), plans on sending just such an explosive surprise to a rival company, disguised as an executive call girl. Frankly, this plan is about as over-complicated as the script could make it, but then there is also some sort of underlying conspiracy between Dunn and a distinctly non-Asian cyborg named Chen (Karen Sheperd). We couldn't be both-

ered to keep it all straight, and frankly, it didn't matter.

The glass shadow is injected into a pretty young cyborg named Cash, played by Angelina Jolie in her first adult role (her first role as an adult, as opposed to the kind of adult role we'd like to see from Jolie). Cash is allegedly the first cyborg with completely human emotions, but it's obvious that Jolie was hired for her looks, not her ability to portray human emotions. "Don't worry about it," we can hear the casting director intone. "If her emotions seem lacking, we'll just say she's playing a robot!"

Cash decides to make a run for Mombasa, the only place where cyborgs can live free to eat scrap metal and dream of electric sheep. (Once again, we began making up better movies in our heads as this one began to fail us.) Accompanying her is Colt (Elias Koteas, the *other* Robert DeNiro), so named because actual character names are too long and hard to remember. Colt's only motivation for breaking corporate law and aiding Cash's escape is that he wants to have sex with her. Actually, that gives *Cyborg 2* an honesty unlike that of other movies of its type, so we'll let that one slide. Colt falls in love with the winsome robot by the end of the film, typically ruining that honesty.

Cash and Colt are pushed and prodded along by Mercy (Palance), a seemingly omniscient cyborg who uses random TV sets as communication devices. Does it matter that TVs don't have built-in cameras, or that they're not plugged in? Not to Mercy, who makes mysterious pronouncements from every nearby screen with the camera pulled in close on his lips and teeth. If you thought watching Jack Palance in a movie was scary, try spending an hour with just his mouth.

On the run, our main characters helpfully explain where they plan to go. Following budget restrictions, they of course plan to go to cheap places like the "warehouse district" (couldn't it have at least been something futuristic like the "warehouse zone" or the "warehouse sector?") and the "old city museum." They are chased by Chen and a blade runner . . . er, *bounty hunter* named Bench (Billy Drago) who specializes in capturing cyborgs. The resulting chase/fight scenes make up the balance of the film, and they're all dark and confusing. We are treated to another eight variations of the final fight from

*Blade Runner*, though you could be excused for thinking the important part of *Blade Runner* was that it was shot in buildings that drip. The finale of *Cyborg 2* is a fight between Colt and Bench underneath the whirring propellers of an abandoned, dry-docked freighter. This sounds a lot more exciting than it is on film, because the propellers are about the size of dinner plates.

*Cyborg 2* is a dark, unpleasant movie with little to distinguish it from any other films of the genre. If you must see it, look forward to the quiet scene between Colt and Bench that could very well be the two actors gossiping between takes, and of course, the first of many nude scenes Angelina Jolie has done during her career. Now there's an obsession we *won't* have to explain.

Of course, most of these post-apocalyptic cyborg films were inspired by *The Terminator* and *Mad Max*. Immediately following those two hits was *Cyborg*, starring Jean-Claude Van Damme. If you didn't guess it was a bad movie from the words "Jean-Claude Van Damme," we can assume you have never seen a movie with Jean-Claude Van Damme. *Cyborg* was directed by Albert Pyun, another name not usually associated with quality pictures, in the same way that internal bleeding is not usually associated with good health. Pyun has actually made no fewer than nine films dealing with some variation on post-apocalyptic cyborgs: *Cyborg*, *Knights*, *Nemesis*, *Nemesis 2: Nebula*, *Nemesis 3: Prey Harder*, *Nemesis 4: Death Angel*, *Heatseeker*, and *Omega Doom*. Somehow he missed making the sequel to his own magnum opus (designated as such because *Cyborg* is one of the very few Pyun films that played in theaters instead of going straight to video), but it's not as if the sequel's director has done bold new things with the franchise.

Cyborg films are a favorite of low budget action movie makers because they are so cost-effective. They allow the filmmaker to include the trappings of a sci-fi action movie (a robot) while allowing that robot to be as cheap as hiring an actor, and usually not a good actor, just a large actor. The illusion that the actor is a robot can be created in any number of cheap ways, including some cheesy *Terminator*-esque make-up, sound effects whenever the cyborg moves, or most commonly by letting the other characters *tell us* that someone is a cyborg. The cyborgs on the video covers for films like *CyberTracker* and *Cyborg 2* were more robotic-looking than anything seen in the actual movies. When robots do eventually take over the world, we hope they go after these moviemakers first.

# Hercules Goes Bananas

(1970, Director: Arthur Allan Seidelman)

Arnold Schwarzenegger is often touted as a man of humble beginnings. The child of poor parents, Schwarzenegger even joined the Austrian Army as a way of adding more fresh meat to his diet while bulking up for the Mr. Universe competition. Those who have seen *Hercules Goes Bananas* (with the imaginative alternate title of *Hercules in New York*) can attest that Arnie's film career is no exception to the pattern of lowly starts.

In 1970, the Austrian Adonis was cast as Hercules. It's not difficult to guess why: Steve Reeves, a Mr. Universe twenty years before Schwarzenegger, proved to be the ideal Hercules in looks if not in acting prowess. Reeves' affable smile (and adequate command of the English language) carried him through the acting rough spots so well that he appeared in a dozen or so Hercules-like roles. Schwarzenegger, on the other hand, could barely string a sentence together in the language of Hollywood, so a voice actor dubbed over his lines, and his polysyllabic name was Americanized to "Arnold Strong."

Not that any of these attempts to make this bodybuilder more palatable to U.S. audiences could have helped this film, in part because they masked the very individuality that made Schwarzenegger appealing in later movies. The end product is a lukewarm comedy with the most rudimentary of jokes and a chop-suey plot that commits criminal offenses against Roman mythology, all backed by an incessantly annoying *bouzouki* score.

It's a nice day on Mt. Olympus, which is to say you can barely hear the traffic from nearby 5th Avenue. In this movie, the home of the gods has rather obviously been simulated in the middle of New York's Central Park. Hercules (Ah-nuld) complains to his father Zeus (Err . . . don't they mean Jupiter?) that other Roman gods like Mars are allowed to go to Earth, but he isn't. Eventually Zeus gets

so annoyed with Hercules that he zaps his son to Earth as a punishment. We're sure there was some logic in there somewhere.

Hercules falls into the sea and is rescued by a passing ship. The ship takes Herc to New York City, where the real comedy can begin. Sadly, the comedy does no such thing. After a few misunderstandings involving Hercules' ignorance of what we mortals call "money," Hercules hooks up with a pretzel vendor named (what else?) Pretzi, played by Arnold Stang. Stang is a gifted voice actor who brought Top Cat and other cartoon characters to life. Here he's more of a Sad Sack, desperately clinging to Hercules for validation.

Now that he has a sidekick to guide him through the modern world, the comedy can start. Too bad the comedy has a previous engagement in a movie starring John Cleese. Instead, Hercules runs across some college athletes and humbles them. He also meets Helen (Deborah Loomis), daughter of a college professor. After some allegedly hilarious misunderstandings, they go on a date and love blooms. The two go on a horseback ride through Mt. Olympus . . . er, Central Park, and Hercules saves her from a bear that escaped from the zoo, or at least a guy in a cheap bear suit. This makes Hercules famous, and he becomes a professional wrestler.

*At last*, the comedy can work its magic, except it got lost on the way to the set. Hercules becomes involved with some mobsters, and then Juno (okay, they got her name right) decides to goad Zeus into sending Nemesis, the goddess of retribution, after Hercules.

*Hercules Goes Bananas* is a perfect testament to the fact that eight year-old boys shouldn't be allowed to write movies. We have no actual proof that screenwriter Aubrey Wisberg relied on his grandson for plot inspiration, but it's the only way we can explain the fact that Samson and Atlas come to Herc's aid in the final climactic battle against Nemesis and the mobsters. Correct us if we're wrong, but we're pretty sure that Samson is from a different set of stories altogether, and if Atlas exists, shouldn't he be holding the planet on his shoulders? Come to think of it, if the human race and the deities who watch over it are as depicted in *Hercules Goes Bananas*, Earth could probably do with a good bump.

The idea of dubbed voices in the movies usually calls to mind foreign films aimed at juvenile audiences, or Asian action movies that have been dubbed into English to relieve viewers of the awful burden of reading. We often wonder what stand-up comedians would do if they didn't have badly dubbed Godzilla and kung fu films to reference for easy laughs.

However, even "serious" films have dubbed actors for various reasons. One of the most obvious reasons is to cover the fact that an actor can't sing if the role requires it. Natalie Wood was covered by Marni Nixon in *West Side Story*, and even though Julia Roberts and Woody Allen sang their own songs in *Everyone Says I Love You*, Drew Barrymore's voice was a counterfeit.

In rare cases someone's voice has to be dubbed for health reasons, or because the onscreen actor died before the soundtrack could be properly finished. David Niven's voice was provided by Rich Little in *Curse of the Pink Panther*, which might be considered Mr. Little's only real contribution to entertainment – if only *Curse* weren't such a wretched film.

In Tim Burton's *Ed Wood*, Vincent D'Onofrio may have been a great stand-in for the young Orson Welles, but to complete the illusion his voice was actually provided by voice actor Maurice LaMarche. This illusion would have been more convincing if LaMarche didn't use the exact same voice to play a lab mouse bent on world domination in the cartoon *Pinky and the Brain*.

There are two embarrassing episodes of dubbing, however, that we should not neglect to mention in this book.

When the post-apocalyptic thriller *Mad Max* was released in the U.S., its star Mel Gibson was dubbed, apparently because it was thought that his Australian accent was too strong. That three *Crocodile Dundee* movies and a Yahoo Serious pic have been released in the U.S. unmolested really has to make you wonder.

Andie MacDowell's voice was dubbed by Glenn Close in *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan*, presumably because Andie's Southern drawl was too strong for the role of Jane. If only Close had dubbed all of MacDowell's subsequent performances – or if we're going to dream, let's go for broke and wish away MacDowell's entire screen career.

# Critters 3

(1991, Director: Kristine Peterson)

As modern horror films acquire numbers in their titles, they are driven to find new ways to make the same monsters interesting in more than one movie. The easiest way to do this is to change the setting. This strategy has worked well for bogeymen including Jason, Leatherface, and the Leprechaun. The search for new places in which to conduct horror stories has become so ridiculous that it has become a modern cliché to set an installment in space. But for *Critters 3*, it wasn't yet necessary to look that far afield. *Critters* and *Critters 2* were set in the rural town of Grover's Bend, and *Critters 3* moves the ravenous puffballs to the city.

As the Sawyer family (father Clifford, son Johnny and daughter Annie) travels home from vacation, their truck gets a flat and they stop at a rest stop near Grover's Bend. While there, Johnny and Annie meet Josh, played by a very young Leonardo DiCaprio. All three of them in turn meet the half-crazed Charlie (Don Opper), the human who became a Critter bounty hunter in the previous installments. Charlie warns the kids about Critters. It's a good thing, because it so happens that a Critter has laid a bunch of Critter eggs in the undercarriage of the family's truck. Before his heart can go on, Josh is taken away by his own family, hopefully not to be seen again.

The Sawyers drive home to an apartment building filled with all those broad stereotypes that populated sitcoms and allegedly funny movies in the '80s. There's the tough and sassy blue-collar woman, the sharp-tongued fat lady, the good-hearted old couple. There are no other hyphenated residents of the apartment building, however, because Frank the maintenance man is actively trying to drive the tenants out so he can sell it to an evil developer.

Needless to say, the Critters hatch and invade the building. Things start slowly enough: Frank is the first to die in the building's laundry room. Soon after the comical fat lady is attacked, and everybody

holes up in the attic to try and fight off the hairy menaces. Think *Die Hard* crossed with *Gremlins*, filmed by the creative minds behind *Beverly Hills Body snatchers* and *Assault of the Killer Bimbos*.

It bears mentioning that the monsters rarely do anything far from the edge of a horizontal surface. Money must have been tight and it's so much less expensive to operate a hand puppet from just behind a washing machine than it is to create a prop with an opening in the middle. Henson's Creature Shop these folks ain't. We wouldn't have minded this quite so much if there had been an actual story to distract us from the shoddy puppetry, but there wasn't.

Speaking of the plot, the situation in the apartment building is further complicated when Mr. Briggs, who wants to buy the building and put up a mini-mall, shows up and cuts the power and telephone, effectively trapping everyone in the building. Oh, and this Mr. Briggs just happens to be Josh's stepfather, who has brought Josh along to "teach him about business." Apparently this apartment building is on the corner of Coincidence Street and Plot Convenience Avenue. Mr. Briggs is killed and everyone else tries to get out of the building, which turns out to be very hard to leave.

The selling point of the original *Critters* film was its humor, but inspiration has become a little thin by this third installment. The biggest laughs are supposed to come from the juxtaposition of TV broadcasts with the action (Julia Child natters on while the Critters eat Mr. Briggs, women's bowling appears as Annie sends an ashcan bouncing down the stairs), watching the Critters drink dishwashing liquid, and Don Opper's Tarzan impression. We found it more amusing to watch how infrequently the background used in the rooftop set matches the exterior locations they actually filmed. When the characters are on the roof it looks like the apartment is located in the business district of L.A., but the real building appears to be in the suburbs.

Also providing some unintentional humor is Leonardo DiCaprio, who must still have been suffering through *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* jokes at this point. A good four years away from his career breakthrough in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*, DiCaprio nonetheless spends an inordinate amount of time preening on screen with his

trademark eye rolling. Our “special edition” of *Critters 3* would include new footage of the Critters feasting on the pre-teen hero while *Titanic* plays on a nearby television. Alas, our best ideas rarely make it to the screen.

Leonardo DiCaprio has the signal honor of starring in the most profitable movie to date: *Titanic*. But given the so-so performance of some of his films and the pure box-office gold of others, we began to wonder: what aspect of his successful pictures helped them rake in the cash, or at least some critical favor? Could it be that, in his better films, Leo's characters end up dead? Our analysis suggests that when Leo's character kicks the oxygen habit, the film is bound to do well. Sure, the female half of the audience is perfectly happy to ooh and ahh over DiCaprio's boyish looks, but you have to give the men in the audience something too – and we want to see him *die*.

Other heartthrobs have flirted with improving their films by removing themselves: Look at Chris O'Donnell's hugely satisfying death scene at the beginning of *Fried Green Tomatoes*. He got run over by a train! If only that had happened to him in *Batman & Robin*, someone might have liked that film – but let's not get carried away.

But in DiCaprio's case, history clearly shows that his films do best when he takes a dirt nap. He had a supporting role in the cult western *The Quick and the Dead*, and he got shot by Gene Hackman. Go Gene, go! Not a huge success, but a fairly well regarded film today. Leo attained star status in *Romeo + Juliet*, where as Romeo he was taken in by a priest's plot to fake Juliet's death. Is it just us, or were all the priests in Shakespeare's plays trained by the Legion of Doom? It always seems like their first instinct is to deal with a problem by spinning an elaborate web of lies. In any case, Leo went on to die his famous icy death in *Titanic* a year later. But after that he insisted on living through the much-hyped *The Beach*, only to see it limp to a box office total that was a mere fifteen percent of his greatest success.

Where should DiCaprio go from here? May we suggest he star in bio-pics based on the lives of Clyde Barrow, Edgar Allan Poe, and General Custer? If they make a movie about the USS *Indianapolis* he should leap at the chance, especially considering his track record with boats. And if he wants to stand on some train tracks, we wouldn't mind.

If DiCaprio's next few films also go the way of *The Beach* and he gets desperate enough, he could star in some future zombie epic. (*Romeo + Juliet 2: Back from the Grave?*) That would give him the opportunity to die *twice*, and that would make twice as much money, right?

# Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation

(1994, Director: Kim Henkel)

Horror movie franchises are known for degenerating as they go on, but this third sequel to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is truly ridiculous. It does not continue the story in any meaningful fashion, but rather tries to remake the original film. Sadly for viewers, the only way it improves on the original is in the spelling of the title and the quality of the film stock.

*Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation* opens with the last group of people (outside of a horror movie) who would ever get involved with a remote family of cannibalistic hillbillies: four high school juniors on prom night. After an opening card that mimics the first installment's claims to be a documentary, we are introduced to our main characters. Jenny, Sean, Heather, and Barry leave the prom early, all the while bickering endlessly to give us some insight into their characters. Barry (Tyler Cone) is a jerk who is cheating on Heather (Lisa Marie Newmyer) because she won't have sex with him. Sean (John Harrison) is a friend of Barry's who hangs out with Jenny, to whom Barry constantly refers as "a dog." At this point we should mention that Jenny is played by Renee Zellweger, who is about as far from being a dog as Pia Zadora is from winning an Oscar.

The four take a wrong turn and end up on a desolate stretch of dirt road in the middle of the woods, where they are involved in a collision with another car. No one seems to be hurt, but the teenaged driver of the other vehicle passes out. Despite Heather's claims that "something bad is going to happen," our heroes make the last decision real people would make in this situation: they split up.

Leaving Sean to wait with the car, Jenny, Barry, and Heather walk down the road until they find a real estate office staffed by Darla (Tonie Perensky). Darla seems to be obsessed with her own

fake breasts, but she does call her redneck boyfriend Vilmer (Matthew McConaughey) to come help the kids out. Vilmer, who is the worst nightmare of every person who has ever called for road assistance, arrives at the scene of the wreck and snaps the other driver's neck. Then he chases Sean around the woods with his tow truck! Sean, unable to outrun one of Detroit's finest creations, dies beneath Vilmer's wheels. Vilmer, determined to do the job right, runs over the body eight or ten times.

Meanwhile, Jenny, Barry, and Heather follow horror flick protocol by separating while trying to relocate the site of the wreck. When they all happen upon a familiar-looking home, they decide to split up yet again, this time to check out the house. With the victims now separated into their single-serving portions, various members of the clan that lives in the house are free to hunt the teenagers down.

If you've seen the original *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, you've seen this, but in a much scarier fashion. All the highlights of the earlier film are here: Leatherface impales Heather on a hook. Barry wanders around the house until he gets brained. Leatherface chases Jenny around the house and surrounding woods until she takes refuge in Darla's office, only to find out Darla is part of the cannibalistic clan. In the original film this scene was a big gotcha, but here it's a pointless revelation because Darla's connection to Vilmer (the new head of the clan) has already been established.

There are just two innovations to the story: Jenny, as the character who is taken hostage and forced to sit at the family's dinner table, *almost* fights back rather than remaining a passive victim. We say almost because the plot requires her to stay in the house, so she isn't allowed to fight back very much. In addition, this clan doesn't really seem to be cannibalistic. Instead, they are part of some kind of conspiracy to scare people, or something. Late in the film, the family is visited by Rothman (James Gale), a well-dressed Englishman who berates Vilmer for not making the "experience" terrifying enough. Rothman, we surmise, represents the ticket-holding audience.

This movie was so badly botched, even the people who made it refused to release it. It sat on the shelf for two years, hurting no one. But then this evil was released to the public by the source of so much

evil in today's world: *Jerry Maguire*.

*Jerry Maguire*, of course, is the hit film that co-starred Zellweger, which explains why she looked so familiar in *TCM:TNG*, and why she kept telling Leatherface, "You had me at *hello*." When Zellweger and McConaughey became big stars in 1997, the release of this film – to video at least – became inevitable.

You can't expect much from the other actors (and you won't get it), but how do the future stars perform in this freshman effort? Zellweger acts like a frightened kitten all the way through, which is about the most we can expect with this script. She should also get points for putting up with people who constantly make fun of her looks. McConaughey, on the other hand, overacts to an extent that would make Jack Nicholson raise his eyebrows approvingly. Whether he's slapping himself in the forehead repeatedly or screaming, "Get her, Leather, we got some more fun today!" Matthew's intent seems to be give a performance so embarrassing (not only to himself but to the film and the profession of acting) that the movie would never be released. We thank him for the attempt.

Rothman, working tirelessly on the behalf of the audience, delivers a final message from the film's creators: "It's been an abomination. You really must accept my sincere apologies . . . I can't tell you how disappointed I am." Buddy, we're right there with you.

# Mazes & Monsters

(1982, Director: Steven Hilliard Stern)

Tom Hanks is arguably the most respected actor working in Hollywood today. Fortunately for those of us writing books like this one, he wasn't always the acting/producing juggernaut we know and love. Practically everyone over the age of 30 remembers Hanks' early star turn as a cross-dressing yuppie in the sitcom *Bosom Buddies*. Hell, we always thought Peter Scolari was going to be the one to go on to stardom from that show, but what did we know? Hanks' first starring role in a "serious" movie, however, was *Mazes and Monsters*, a psychodrama that has not aged well.

*Mazes and Monsters* was based on a novel by Rona Jaffe, which was in turn based on the real life case of Dallas Egbert III, a sixteen year-old sophomore at Michigan State University. One day in August 1979, Egbert disappeared, taking none of his possessions with him. Egbert's family hired a private investigator, William Dear, to find the young man. At his first press conference Dear advanced a bizarre theory that Egbert had been obsessed with the fantasy role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons – so obsessed that he took a sword and went hunting for monsters in the university's steam tunnels until he had a fatal accident.

There were a few little problems with this theory, mostly involving the fact that there was no evidence that Egbert played Dungeons & Dragons with anyone on campus, but the image of a loner nerd pretending to be a medieval warrior caught on with the media. Egbert was found a month later and his disappearance turned out to have everything to do with his drug use and confused sexuality and nothing to do with Dungeons & Dragons (as Dear later explained in his book *The Dungeon Master*), but the more exotic image had stuck.

In *Mazes and Monsters*, Tom Hanks plays the Egbert character, Robbie Wheeling. Wheeling has just enrolled in college, and his parents remind him of the "trouble" he had with *Mazes and Monsters*, a

game that is a mere alliteration away from D&D. But Robbie isn't at school long before he falls in with a group of M&M players, and we don't mean people who enjoy little colored candies. Robbie becomes the fourth player for the group, which includes "Maze Controller" Jay Jay Brockway (Chris Makepeace, his bodyguard nowhere to be seen), Daniel (David Wallace), and Kate (Wendy Crewson). A good portion of the first act follows Robbie and Kate as they fall in love in typical '80s TV movie style – in other words, happy times montages and sappy love songs.

Before you can say "commercial break," things go wrong. Robbie begins to take his M&M character, a cleric, too seriously. Then Jay Jay comes up with the bright idea of playing M&M in the forbidden Piquot Caverns near campus. This involves dressing up in costumes rejected by the local Renaissance festival and wandering around pretending to be scared by props that Jay Jay has littered about the abandoned mine. Unfortunately, Robbie has a hallucinatory encounter with a monster that leads to bizarre dreams and soon his cleric character has taken over his life.

One of the first things that struck us nerds is how little Mazes and Monsters resembles any real role-playing game. Obviously the filmmakers never bothered to do any research. M&M is played with no dice, and we never see the mess of papers that is associated with every role-playing game we've ever witnessed. Essentially, the players tell Jay Jay what their characters want to do, and Jay Jay tells them if they're dead or not. No hit points, no saving throws, no rolls against charisma to see if the serving wench sleeps with you. It's pretty damn boring. Also, the idea that you could play a role-playing game like this in real time in a dark cavern is pretty ridiculous. You'd be as likely to find a bridge tournament as a role-playing game under conditions like that.

The largest suspension of disbelief this movie asks of us is that the main thing driving Robbie crazy is his obsession with the game. Other than that, his life seems fine. Hell, he's even getting laid on a regular basis, which is more than what 99.9% of all Dungeons & Dragon players could claim in 1982. The idea that a role-playing game could take over someone's life so totally that it could drive a

sane person insane seems to be widespread (though these days this belief has been transferred to computer games of various sorts), but has no basis in reality. If games like D&D really had such power, the nerd population of the world would be a lot smaller.

Eventually Robbie goes so bonkers that he leaves campus and starts wandering New York City. At this point the movie becomes the Tom Hanks *tour de force* for which we've been waiting. Watch Tom sweat and stumble through subway tunnels. Watch him mumble *faux* Old English platitudes to homeless people. Watch him fight a mugger to protect his little leather pouch of magic spells. If we could keep a straight face while doing so, we might even suggest that this material served him when, twenty years later, he played a marooned man in *Cast Away*. In this movie Tom Hanks is to acting as vinegar is to chocolate milk. Mixing the two will turn your stomach.

If Hanks were the only disappointment in the movie, we might have ended the review there. But no: Makepeace and the other teen-aged idiots in front of the camera contribute to our pain by reciting phony dialogue and frowning in mock concern. Imagine an adolescent version of "Mary Worth," set in the '80s, and you just might get a feeling for the sort of universe in which Robbie Wheeling lives. If we had to deal with these petulant blockheads on a daily basis, we might take to wandering the streets of Manhattan ourselves. Add Robbie's wheedling mother and belligerent dad (Lloyd Bochner, the monarch of abusive movie fathers) and you begin to wonder why it took an hour of movie time for Robbie to flip his lid, and why the movie remains focused on the ill effects of the game. Sure, some lip service is paid to Robbie's missing brother and his unhappy family life, but the message is clear: get mixed up in medieval fantasy, and you'll end up a loonie Just Like Robbie.

Considering that loonies like Robbie go on to marry beautiful women, make twenty million dollars for three months of work, and win two Academy Awards despite extreme goofiness and bad hair, we're thinking hard about digging out those old D&D manuals from our parents' attics.

# Graduation Day

(1981, Director: Herb Freed)

A quick look around the horror section of any decent video store will reveal many films like *Graduation Day*. They're high school horror/revenge flicks, inspired by their dishonorable predecessors like *Prom Night*. Why exactly anyone thought audiences wanted to watch the same story over and over again is beyond guessing, but that didn't stop studios from turning out the same movie dozens of times with different (and usually school-event related) themes and titles.

*Graduation Day* distinguishes itself from its celluloid colleagues by never actually showing the event in question. Although the events in the movie take place around a high school graduation day (parties, rehearsals, last minute exams, last-minute school pranks), we never see anyone graduate. No diplomas, no "Pomp and Circumstance," no grimacing principal in front of an audience – just a lot of silly music video scenes and a crazed killer bent on eliminating the members of the school track team.

Our story begins with the accidental death of a young track star, Laura, during a race. Her coach pushes her to the finish line, where a blood clot in her brain leaves her face down on the track. Flash forward to the last days before graduation, when Laura's sister Anne returns to town from her Navy assignment. Coincidentally, this is also the period of time when the other members of the track team begin to go missing, one by one.

Anne is in town to attend the graduation to pick up some post-humous honors on Laura's behalf. The weird thing is that she's the closest thing to a main character the film has, yet she disappears from the movie for more than forty minutes. The middle part of the film is devoted to the murderer's rampage, as the various kids are stalked by Steadicam™ shots and then dispatched. Every movie killer has their preferred killing method, and this one seems to like spikes.

The center section of the movie also sets up a bewildering array of suspects for the identity of the killer, including the coach, Laura's ex-boyfriend Kevin, the school's principal, and a crazy campus cop. Probably the most noteworthy thing about this part of the movie is that it includes a young Vanna White playing one of the school's students. Yes, folks, before she was turning letters on *Wheel of Fortune*, she was turning in lousy performances as a screaming teenager.

The most excruciatingly painful thing about the movie has to be the nearly eight-minute long musical number by a band named Felony. As near as we could tell the name of the song they play is "Gangster Rock," and it goes on forever. Because Felony is playing at a high school function in the '80s, the students roller-skate around the band as they play. And because Felony is a band in the '80s, all the members wear heavy female make-up even though they're all guys. At least we hope they were all guys. Felony reminds us of Duran Duran, only less talented. Yes, *less* talented than Duran Duran.

So students get killed for a while, and then Anne, after a long absence from the film, confronts the killer. Now if you remember the beginning of the flick, Anne is a Navy officer, so she should have *some* training in self-defense, right? Well, Anne displays some lame karate chops, but besides that, she displays all the attributes of the final female victim of any horror film. She stumbles and falls for no reason, she mysteriously avoids the safety of other people, and she studiously ignores the weapons that fall out of the killer's hands. So much for the fighting precision of our trained Navy personnel.

Fortunately, *Graduation Day* did provide us with two of the important staples of teen horror flicks: copious nudity and improbably complicated death sequences. Providing us with some of that nudity is Linnea Quigley, who practically made a career out of exposing herself in such films. Here she seduces a music teacher into giving her a passing grade. Imagine what she had to do for the *math* teacher! As to improbably complicated deaths, since it's the track team that's going down, the deaths all involve athletic equipment. Man, we knew pole vaulting was dangerous, but this is just darn silly.

# Zombie High

(1987, Director: Ron Link)

Our initial hope upon seeing the title of this film was for a movie featuring mind-altering chemicals and reanimated corpses. You know, kind of a *Dazed and Confused* meets *Night of the Living Dead* sorta thing. That might have been funny, especially since stoners and zombies are both desperately in need of the same thing: brains. We would call such a movie *The Grateful Undead*. Instead, we ended up with boarding-school brats threatened with experimental brain surgery that converts them into Young Republicans. Think of it as *The Undead Poets Society*.

When Andrea (a twenty-four year-old Virginia Madsen) arrives at Ettinger High on an unexpected scholarship, her initial thoughts are of schoolwork, roommates (including super-hottie Sherilyn Fenn), and her boyfriend Barry, who still attends public school a lengthy drive away. Soon though, she becomes concerned about the doings of the faculty. It seems that normal, fun-loving American kids are turning into cold, success-oriented robots, which usually doesn't happen until their early thirties. Andrea soon gets wind that a medical operation is involved in this process, and is horrified when one of her friends dies on the operating table.

So what's a girl to do? Why, start a romantic relationship with her history teacher, of course! The teacher, Dr. Philo (vaunted TV and film actor Richard Cox), whose on-campus apartment resembles a leftover set from *Miami Vice*, begins to court Andrea despite their age difference. Andrea finds herself attracted to the older man, especially after he introduces her to the mysteries of the pin screen – a sure sign that this film was made in the late '80s. She realizes, however, that Philo is part of the sinister plot to deprive the Ettinger students of a crucial part of their brains so that the faculty might live forever. And in an amazing coincidence it just happens that after the school's

"You Gotta Start Somewhere" 37

surgeons remove that vital bit of brain they can replace it with a crystal which allows the school faculty to control the newly zombified students via radio waves. To paraphrase one of the policemen in the film, it's the craziest damn thing we ever heard. Will Andrea escape the clutches of Philo and the evil Dr. Eisner? Or will she be subjected to the operation and thus buy a minivan and begin reading *Woman's Day* years before her time?

About a half-hour into *Zombie High*, we realized two things. First, this movie hates closeups. Dozens of scenes go by without a single camera angle nearer than a medium-close shot. This makes it difficult to get a good look at Andrea or any of her friends, which would facilitate the process of telling one from the other. Sherilyn Fenn (later a star of *Twin Peaks*) had been on screen for five minutes before Chris realized it was her, and that's really saying something.

The other thing we realized is that the screenwriters watched a lot of other, better movies and tv shows while they were writing the script for *Zombie High*. Not only do they rip off a Woody Allen joke in the first twenty minutes, but later scenes put us in mind of *Coma*, *The Stepford Wives*, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and *The Streets of San Francisco*, just to name the ones we wrote down in our notes. The plot was also suspiciously like that of the second Night Stalker movie, *The Night Strangler*. *Zombie High* features people from the Civil War era gaining functional immortality by consuming brain chemicals, which is pretty much the plot of *The Night Strangler*, and in both films the protagonists discover what's going on by stumbling upon a painting. It's one thing to steal a premise, but individual plot elements?

Just as we were prepared to suffer meaninglessly for another forty minutes or so, the strangest thing happened to *Zombie High*. It became mildly funny. It's almost as if the filmmakers sensed the true movie badness for which they were headed, and decided to go for self-parody after an hour of deadly-serious screen time. Scenes like the school dance, in which the zombie kids all boogie in step, actually relieved the sheer boredom that plagued the beginning of the movie. But hey, let's not kid ourselves. It's still a crappy little flick.

# King Kong

(1976, Director: John Guillermin)

When watching *King Kong* (1976), it's tough to not think of *Godzilla* (1998). Both were modern remakes of monster classics. Both had lame scripts and a suspicious lack of big name stars despite big budget pedigrees. Most crucially, both used different special effects techniques than their predecessors to bring the monster to life.

Where the two films differ is that *Godzilla* (1998) tried to be its own movie. *King Kong '76* follows the plot of the original quite closely, with only a few changes. What's amazing is that every one of those changes is for the worse. This isn't just a matter of updating. It's a matter of rendering the film silly and boring at every turn. Despite the thrill that monster-movie lovers might feel at the prospect of an update of their favorite giant ape, there are scenes in this movie that will reduce them to the level of despondent two-year olds, standing alone on a cold street corner rubbing the tears from their eyes.

The original *King Kong* followed a movie crew looking for nature-themed thrills. That, at least, explained what a beautiful American woman was doing on a Pacific Island. *King Kong '76* follows an expedition by the Petrox Company to find oil on a hidden Island. Years of watching '50s science fiction films has taught us that women can't do real science, so we weren't surprised to see that none are present on the expedition. Instead they have to find a woman along the way, namely the castaway Dwan. No, that isn't a typo, that's her name, and she's played by Jessica Lange. She also just happens to be an actress. She was on a friend's yacht when it exploded, but because she was on deck, she was able to get to a life raft. It seems she didn't like the movie playing below deck. She explains:

Did you ever meet anyone before whose life was saved by *Deep Throat*?

We assume she's some kind of *X-Files* fan.

You will notice that much of the added material dates the film horribly. Sure, today it seems a little quaint in *King Kong* (1933) that Carl Denham could achieve fame by making nature documentaries, but we can roll with it. *King Kong '76*, on the other hand, hits us over the head with its '70s setting at every turn. There are many references to "the energy crisis," and while a movie crew has a timeless glamour, the adventures of an oil prospecting crew don't exactly stir the blood.

Meanwhile, the film is so desperate for a hero that one has to stow away on the ship. That hero is Jack Prescott, played by Jeff Bridges. (Because it's the '70s, Jeff is even shaggier than Kong.) Jack works as a primate paleontologist, and he wants to go to the hidden island for which the Petrox ship is bound.

Once our characters get to the island, things go as you'd expect. The expedition, with Dwan (snicker) in tow, finds a giant wall and some suspiciously African-looking natives living on the Pacific island. The islanders want to sacrifice Dwan to Kong, their local god. They kidnap her from the ship in the dead of night and lash her to a ceremonial platform just outside the gates. Then Kong comes through the jungle, knocking over trees left and right. If the islanders do this often enough to justify building a platform, wouldn't it seem likely that Kong would have already knocked over all the nearby trees?

The plot holds no surprises. Dwan is taken prisoner by Kong, who taunts her for having such a stupid name. Although she comes to understand and even be fond of Kong, Dwan is nonetheless grateful to see Jack, who rescues her from Kong's clutches. Since the island is woefully devoid of oil, the expedition's leader, Fred Wilson (Charles Grodin), decides not to go back empty-handed and devises a way to capture Kong. Once on the island of Manhattan, Kong escapes and does some predictably stupid things.

We would like to be able to say that this movie might have gone over better if its makers had waited another twenty years for better special effects technology. Given the story and acting on display here, however, the goofy (but plentiful) special effects are the least of this movie's worries. Rick Baker's effects and performance as Kong vary

from laughable to breathtaking. There are moments in which Kong is more alive and believable than his human co-stars, but occasionally a badly matted shot or a cut to the stiff, mechanical full-size version will ruin the illusion. It would have been nice to see Kong act a bit more like an ape (there's very little knuckle-walking going on here, further reinforcing the idea that it's just a guy in a costume), but so long as he's wetting down the already half-naked Jessica Lange in a waterfall and then blowing her dry with his monkey breath, we find it difficult to complain at any length about Kong himself.

To be fair, not all of the actors are chewing the scenery. A bit of slack-jawed wonder and earnest staring is expected from Jeff Bridges; he is backed up by Rene Auberjonois (one of the most underrated actors of all time) and a very steady Jack O'Halloran, whom you may remember from *Superman II*. Their good work is hampered, however, by the vapid camera lovemaking from Jessica Lange and over-the-top show from Charles Grodin. This was Lange's film debut, and it's no wonder that her career took a three-year vacation afterwards. Sadly, the same cannot be said for Charles Grodin, who was working again in no time.

The script offers no assistance; it is full of bad jokes, including a plethora of wink-at-the-camera humor. Grodin's character exists merely to be proven wrong five seconds after he says anything, and when he's not being stupid, he's acting dumb. "Let's not get eaten alive on this island!" he yells. "Bring the mosquito spray!" Just when we think his character couldn't be any flatter, a well-placed step from Kong helpfully shows us just how two-dimensional the guy can be.

The high-handedness of Prescott's dialogue irked us a bit as well. When someone remarks that the island's natives will be glad to be rid of Kong, Jack expresses the opposite opinion: "They'll miss him a lot. He was the terror, the mystery of their lives. And the magic. A year from now that will be an island full of burnt out drunks." Amazing, huh? Because usually you'd think that the presence of a 50-foot tall man-eating gorilla in the immediate vicinity would *cause* people to drink, not prevent it. But then we're not primate paleontologists like Jack Prescott. We were also a bit suspicious when this animal rights booster picks up an abandoned chinchilla coat for Dwan, and

then compliments her on how she looks in it.

The worst insult, however, is the complete removal of dinosaurs from the story. When they looked at the original movie for inspiration for their remake, did the filmmakers somehow miss that the dinosaurs were the best part? The only other wildlife we see on the island is a very large and very immobile snake puppet that King Kong wrestles to a very gory end. Ugh.

Despite the bloody helicopter attack on Kong at the climax and the movie's inevitable failure at the box office, this movie had a happy ending for nearly everyone involved. Jessica Lange got positively vicious notices for her work here, some of which intimated that she should stick to her original line of study: mime. She later went on to win two Oscars for her acting. Rene Auberjonois got a role on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and the lifetime income that comes with it. Rick Baker went on to win six Oscars for his work in cinema makeup, including the first-ever Oscar for makeup design. Charles Grodin has a cable talk show. Jeff Bridges is one of the most respected actors of his generation. And, God help us, producer Dino De Laurentis got a lifetime achievement award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Just in case you weren't sure the universe was a cold, unfeeling place, proof comes along.

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## About the Authors

Scott Hamilton and Christopher Holland have been writing about movies together for nearly ten years, at first in their college newspaper, and later in magazines like *SFX* and *The Radio Times*, and on the web. In 1996 they created Stomp Tokyo, a web site designed to focus on all kinds of movies on home video, but which quickly became synonymous with b-movies, cult flicks, and genre films. (With a name like Stomp Tokyo, it was bound to happen.)

Since then, Stomp Tokyo has evolved to include a number of side projects and sub-sites by other authors, including The Bad Movie Report, Attack of the 50 Foot DVD, and Bad Movie Planet. In 2000, Chris and Scott wrote a number of reviews for *The Radio Times Guide to Film*. The *New York Times* called Stomp Tokyo “a place to indulge your questionable cinematic taste,” and *Entertainment Weekly* has dubbed it “trash movie paradise.” The site has also been featured in The *St. Petersburg Times*, The *San Francisco Chronicle*, and a number of “site of the day” web sites, including the original Cool Site of the Day and PCWorld Online.

The authors live in St. Petersburg, Florida, where they maintain Stomp Tokyo as a publishing business for their online and print endeavors. *Reel Shame* is their first book.

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