

January 2023



The Great Muppet Caper • The Last Unicorn • Flight of the Navigator
Honey, I Shrunk the Kids • The Neverending Story • Troll
Troop Beverly Hills • My Neighbor Totoro

GIRLS, ON FILM

The Great Muppet Caper	5
The Last Unicorn	8
The Neverending Story	11
Troll	14
Flight of the Navigator	17
My Neighbor Totoro	20
Troop Beverly Hills	23
Honey I Shrunk the Kids	26
Endnotes	29

ISSUE #19/JANUARY 2023

get hopelessly devoted at girlsonfilmzine.com.



KID-TESTED. ZINESTER-APPROVED.

Welcome to the 19th issue of *Girls, on Film*, the zine that's hopelessly devoted to 80s movies. Each issue features eight 80s movies related to a particular theme. *Girls, on Film* is our opportunity to reminisce with other 80s fans and to introduce new generations to the films of this decade. We cover all kinds of movies. Our essays are a mix of commentary, review, and production history. Check out digital back issues for free on our website at girlsonfilmzine.com.

This time we're talking about family-friendly films (G and PG-rated movies) of the 1980s. Below are summaries of the films discussed in this issue.

WE'LL BE RIGHT BACK AFTER THESE MESSAGES

The Great Muppet Caper (1981). Kermit and the gang head to London to try to nab a mysterious jewel thief.

The Last Unicorn (1982). The story of the last surviving unicorn on Earth deliv-

ers to viewers a true quest in “question”!

The Neverending Story (1984). A young boy gets lost in the fantasy world of a book in which the characters need his help to save their world.

Troll (1986). Long before the famous wizarding lad, there was another magical Harry Potter.

Flight of the Navigator (1986). A boy who has been missing for eight years mysteriously resurfaces completely unchanged.

My Neighbor Totoro (1988). Everything around us has a spirit. Seriously. And sometimes, it's a giant, fluffy new friend.

Troop Beverly Hills (1989). A troop of privileged rich kids tries to make it in the cut-throat world of the Wilderness Girls.

Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (1989). Disney kicks off a never-ending franchise with the tale of an eccentric inventor who accidentally shrinks his kids and the neighbors' kids.

BEHIND THE ZINES.

Girls, on Film was founded in 2017 by DC-area friends Stephanie McDevitt and Janene Scelza. We do almost all production work in-house: planning, writing, editing, design, and marketing. Full-color issue printing is done through Blurb (blurb.com).

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

Many thanks to our contributing writers, Dr. Rhonda Baughman and Matt Scelza, and guest writer Ed Cash for their work on this issue.

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

FOUNDERS/EDITORS

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

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

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

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

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

GUEST WRITER

Ed Cash. Ed is using a pseudonym. His name has been changed to protect the innocent. He's pretty darn excited to jump into the family-friendly theme and write for *Girls, On Film*. He is an actual guy and insists that Phil Collins was the coolest cat of the 80's

CONTACT THE GIRLS

Web: girlsonfilmzine.com
Mail: info@girlsonfilmzine.com
Twitter & IG: [@girlson80sfilms](https://www.instagram.com/@girlson80sfilms)
Facebook: [thegirlsonfilmzine](https://www.facebook.com/thegirlsonfilmzine)



FOR JUSTICE, FOR FREEDOM, FOR HONESTY THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER

STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

The Great Muppet Caper is the Muppets' second theatrical release and Jim Henson's feature film directorial debut. This movie came out about two years after *The Muppet Movie* and shortly after the final season of *The Muppet Show* [1]. While I don't have as many fond memories of this movie as I do of *The Muppets Take Manhattan* (see GOF Issue 16), I was delighted by how silly and fun it was. If you like any of the Muppet programming, I highly recommend this movie for a fun, family-film night.

In this movie, Kermit and Fozzie play identical twin reporters trying to break a big story for their newspaper. With Gonzo in tow as their photographer, they fail to report on a big jewel heist and instead do a cover feature on identical twins joining the newspaper staff. In order to keep their jobs, they decide to travel to London to interview the famous fashion designer Lady Holiday (Diana Rigg), who was the victim of the jewel thief.

Meanwhile, Miss Piggy is trying to break into the fashion industry in London. She works her way into Lady Holiday's office and attempts to get hired as a model. Lady Holiday is not impressed with Piggy's portfolio, but she agrees to hire Piggy as an assistant. As Piggy celebrates her new job, Kermit walks in and immediately mistakes her for Lady Holiday. Piggy has instant heart eyes for Kermit, so she doesn't correct him and instead agrees to meet him for dinner.

Piggy's scheme blows up pretty quickly when they're at dinner and Lady Holiday is there with her brother Nicky (Charles Grodin). Nicky is quickly infatuated with Miss Piggy, and he dances with her during an elaborate musical sequence in the club. However, the lights suddenly go out and Lady Holiday's jewelry is stolen again. At this point, the thieves are revealed as Nicky and three of Lady Holiday's models: Darla, Karla, and Marla. Also, Kermit figures out



THE CRACK NEWS TEAM.



MY WHAT A BIG BOW YOU HAVE.



CAN YOU TELL THEM APART?

that Piggy is not Lady Holiday. As she runs away, he's left confused and angry that she lied to him.

At the launch of Lady Holiday's new clothing line, Nicky shows up and openly pursues Miss Piggy. She refutes his advances, so when Nicky pulls off another heist, he plants the jewelry on Miss Piggy, and she ends up in jail. Now, Nicky is planning his biggest heist yet: Lady Holiday's Baseball Diamond. Kermit and the rest of the Muppets realize that Miss Piggy is innocent, so they decide that they need to catch Nicky in the act of stealing the Baseball Diamond. In typical zany Muppet fashion, they all head out to foil Nicky's caper and get Miss Piggy out of jail.

Like I said at the beginning, this movie is very silly and fun, and it's totally meta. Throughout the movie, the Muppets are constantly referencing the fact that they're trying to make a movie. The opening scene involves Kermit, Fozzie, and Gonzo discussing the names in the opening credits. In another scene, Piggy and Kermit get into an argument when Kermit tells her she's overacting. According to the excellent Muppet website Toughpigs.com, there is an earlier version of the script that had Rowlf playing "Rainbow Connection" on the piano. "Kermit notices and tells him, 'Wrong movie.' Rowlf replies, 'Oh yeah, sorry. I still think it should have won the Oscar'" [2].

Another great running gag is that Kermit and Fozzie are supposed to be identical twins. In the

beginning, their newspaper editor, Mike Tarkanian (Jack Warden), says they don't look like twins, but when Kermit puts his hat on to match Fozzie, their boss says he can see it. In fact, Tarkanian worked with their father, and he keeps a picture of himself with their father on his desk, which shows him with a green bear. It's an excellent sight gag.

For any eagle eyed viewers out there, there's another great joke when Kermit and Piggy are out to dinner. Kermit realizes it's going to be an expensive meal, so Gonzo offers to help by taking pictures of diners for \$10 a pop. Gonzo approaches one table and the man turns him down, and when Gonzo pushes it, the man finally explains that the woman he is with is not his wife (she's home sick). In an article for Toughpigs.com, Joe Hennes points out that the same man is seen with three different women throughout the scene. Hennes says, "So in one evening, he is seen dining with two different women, dancing with a third, and he has a wife who's sick at home. Frog only knows how many more women he's juggling at the same time" [3].

Speaking of the humans in this movie, the actors really held their own with the Muppets. In my previous article on *The Muppets Take Manhattan*, I mentioned that they had trouble finding actors who looked natural talking to the Muppets. Well, in this movie, that was not an issue. Charles Grodin is just great as the villain Nicky Holiday. In a Slate obituary for Grodin (who died in 2021), Matthew Dessem said, "a light has been extin-



SIR, WE'RE TRYING TO MAKE A MOVIE.



THE START OF A GREAT LOVE AFFAIR.



FOILING A HEIST MUPPET STYLE.

guished, a greatness has gone out of the world, and it's fair to wonder if any other actor will ever embody pure, untamed desire for Miss Piggy the way Charles Grodin did. He was sensational" [4].

Grodin's appearance is also the fodder for one of the great Muppet mysteries. There's a scene where he's singing during the musical number "Piggy's Fantasy," but it's very clear that he's lip syncing to someone else's voice. However, we don't know whose voice is used in this song. No one is credited in the movie or the soundtrack. Toughpigs.com offers some guesses, but they have no concrete evidence as to who it is [5]. And if it's Grodin lip-syncing to himself, why not just sing for real?

According to Hennes, Jason Segel wanted Grodin to reprise his Nicky Holiday character for the 2011 Muppet movie, *The Muppets*. While Grodin ultimately declined to appear in the movie, he wrote a piece for Vulture about his love affair with Miss Piggy [6]. It's bizarre, but you should definitely read it (see the endnotes for the link) [7].

In addition to the great performance by Grodin, John Cleese puts in an amazing appearance as Neville, a stuffy rich guy whose house Piggy breaks into. Piggy needs an impressive house to convince Kermit that she is really Lady Holiday. So, as Piggy scales the drain pipe to break in, Neville sits with his wife Dorcas (Joan Sanderson) and they have the most boring, droll dinner conversation. It's a scene that could have come directly from Monty

Python. When Neville eventually catches Piggy and Kermit in the house, instead of kicking them out, he gives them recommendations for a good restaurant (well, it's more of a dinner club, really).

Finally, Peter Falk shows up in an uncredited role as a homeless man who approaches Kermit in the park shortly after Kermit discovers all of Piggy's lies. Falk tries to tell Kermit that he knows Kermit's story, and then he launches into a ridiculous monologue about how Kermit and his brother-in-law bought a dry cleaners that was eventually bought out by a competitor, his kids are juvenile delinquents, and his brother-in-law eventually joined the circus. Kermit tells him that he's completely wrong, and then tells him that they're trying to make a movie. Falk apologizes and then tries to sell Kermit a watch. It's super weird and really funny.

Well, despite the running gags and funny cameos, *The Great Muppet Caper* only did about half the box office business that *The Muppet Movie* did two years earlier. The reviews were mixed, but everyone seemed to love Miss Piggy [8]. A weird bit of trivia about this movie: Miss Piggy won the Youth in Film Award for Best Young Musical Recording Artist for her performance of "The First Time It Happens," becoming the first, and only, non-human recipient in the history of the award [9]. All in all you should ignore the critics and watch this movie. It's funny and weird and gets a big thumbs up from this Muppet fan.



LOOKING FOR ANSWERS? THE LAST UNICORN

DR. RHONDA BAUGHMAN

On a rainy, intense Tuesday afternoon, I wondered idly if anything could distract me in my obsessive search for affordable collections of Paul Verhoeven films. As it turns out, Peter Beagle's screenplay for *The Last Unicorn* (1982) [1] fit the criteria. Strange to compare the two (Verhoeven and Beagle) initially, but also not that strange. Beagle's writing, alongside Topcraft animators and *Unicorn*'s directors, Arthur Rankin, Jr. and Jules Bass, provide a film that contains elements I'd expect of Verhoeven's films: complex, layered, and full of startlingly adult dialogue, but *Unicorn* eliminates the awkward tension, yet still generates thought-provoking questions beside colorful action. Frankly, too, *Unicorn* is more intricate than I realized as a child and, as an adult, teasing me with its delightful but dark content, this animated classic lured me away from my ultimately brief interest in the realistically bleak Verhoeven oeuvre.

Like many a quest or hero's journey narrative archetype, *The Last Unicorn* begins with a central question

of self-reflection—one that needs answering by the film's end. Is it "What do men know?" No, although it could be since the Unicorn (voiced by Mia Farrow) poses that question in the first few minutes of the film, but we're left without an answer. As a non-unicorn in the audience, I don't have an answer, not even now, 40+ years after the film's release.

Is the quest question: "What if there are no happy endings?" Possibly. Unicorn pal Molly Grue (voiced by Tammy Grimes) [2] offers this question more than halfway through the film, and it's answered right away by Unicorn protector Schmendrick the Magician (voiced by Alan Arkin) who says: "There are no happy endings because nothing ends."

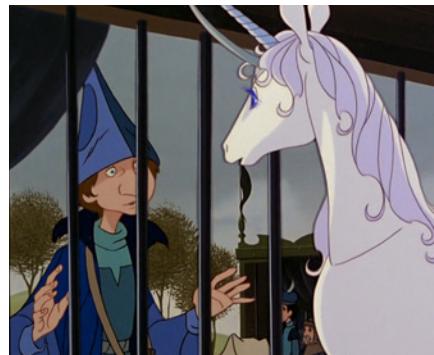
Whew—nothing sugar-coated in *The Last Unicorn* that's for sure. "Nothing ever ends" is heady discourse to be placed upon the minds of children, and it's still heady stuff for me to ponder as a (mostly) adult. Days after re-watching *The Last Unicorn*, I still thought



NO SUCH THING AS UNICORNS?



EVERYONE WANTS A PIECE.



SCHMENDRICK TO THE RESCUE!

of “nothingness” and “endings” because certainly, everything ends, but also—it doesn’t. Because … ahh, never mind. I lack the kind of patience needed to fully explore that paradox right here, right now [3].

One paradox I can address, however, is the fundamental question for *The Last Unicorn*: “Am I truly the last?” Would the Unicorn believe herself less special or more special if she were the last? Didn’t Schmendrick, in his way, already answer that question with his “nothing ever ends”? But the question needs expressed, for forward plot momentum, and once spoken—“Am I truly the last?”—the audience is off and galloping with the Unicorn and some buds she picks up along the way to discover, indeed, if she is the last of her kind, the only unicorn left in all the world.

New pals speak in riddles to help answer her question, some friends drop vague hints while others offer more direct assistance. Along the way to the answer she seeks, our Unicorn will make friends, be captured and traveling-circus displayed, yet escape confinements to teach and learn lessons. Eventually our Unicorn becomes human and nearly loses her mind before returning to unicorn form, but she does lose something else important in the re-transformation process. I can appreciate, too, that our Unicorn destroys a castle and battles the Red Beast, all the while pontificating—much destruction even when deep in thought. Eventually, she answers her own question as to whether she is truly the last but also realizes in the end she may have needed to ask some different questions all along, and that it’s never too late to do so.

Rather facile for me to simply write that *The Last Unicorn* is so much more complex than I noticed in

my youth, but while true, *Unicorn* is technically also much more complex than I noticed on my first recent re-watch as an adult. Being completely honest, only on my recent second adult re-watch (a few days after the first) did I realize that *The Last Unicorn* might not be suitable for young children under 6 [4] at all, with or without well-versed and properly rehearsed adults present and fully cognizant to answer difficult questions directly asked in film dialogue as well as those queries behind situations only hinted at. (An example of the latter: I can guarantee this film provided early conditioning for my dislike of zoos).

Should accompanying adults be lucky, the child watching will remain incurious and skip the questions altogether and be more like me: singing the only lyrics a young brain could determine and recall without the instant subtitle assistance we have now (listed below, in order, with the exception of the film’s title at the beginning and end): “The last Unicorn! ... I’m alive! I’m alive! I’m alive! ... when the last moon is cast over the last star of morning, and the future is passed without even a last desperate warning ... I’m alive! I’m alive! I’m alive! ... the last Unicorn!”

Both my volume and inflection were concentrated on the phrase “I’m alive” as well as the incorrect placement of “the last Unicorn!” sung repeatedly, randomly, often without warning, at home and in public, but my memory no longer serves precisely how much Excedrin my parents (and grandparents) consumed to put up with my intense demonstrations (in occasionally borderline histrionic shrieking) of last unicorn love.

The band America opens the film with the title song and as a kid I could detect some melodramatic wist-



RED BULL TAKES YOUR WINGS.



HAGGARD THE HORRIBLE.



WHAT IF HE WAS THE FROG PRINCE?!

fulness, and now as an adult I can detect the same but also appreciate the rest of the soundtrack. Overall, that America intro/outro alongside the London Symphony Orchestra just hits differently (stronger, deeper) than music from so many of the animated films born after the Unicorn era. Unfortunately, locating the soundtrack is pricey as it was released only in Germany and a current swipe through sellers on Discogs shows few original/re-release vinyl record copies for sale in the US. No matter, really, because America's title track will burrow into your psyche for constant earwig replay whether you want it to or not.

Unicorn's voice cast is a veritable who's who of iconic, multi-talented stars from TV, film, and stage: comedians, cabaret performers, Tony-award winners, Grammy nominees, including but not limited to those mentioned above, and the voices of Jeff Bridges, Robert Klein, and Angela Lansbury. This combo cast, alongside my aforementioned note of Beagle's writing and the Topcraft animation, work in tandem to hold my attention for *The Last Unicorn* and all its questions, as an adult—and for the full 93 minutes.

The quick, yet standout scenes stealing the third act entirely, belong to a cat with an eye-patch (voiced by Paul Frees) and a smug skull (voice of superstar René Auberjonois of Boston Legal fame). The cat speaks in riddles and tells us "cats cannot be deceived—although it's easy to deceive humans," while the skull details the secret to finding the Red Bull for a bottle of invisible hooch. (The Red Bull, of course, holds the answer to our heroine's title quest question!) Personally, having only voiced one line of one minor character, in one micro-budget movie, I felt twinges of jealousy at Auberjonois's execution of this toon skull role:

it's the kind of small, yet forceful and memorable animated voice role some actors can only dream of.

Speaking of that sleeping realm full of slippery synchronicity, our Unicorn exclaims: "I am always dreaming, even when awake." This line is an advanced and magically intricate philosophical and psychological theme—just one of the many that exceeds the bare bones basics I often see now in cartoons that include personification/anthropomorphism. Additional advanced themes for *The Last Unicorn* include shadow work and paradox; the faults of heroes and the surprising insight available from villains; gaslighting; people's need to believe whatever comes easiest; love is love; fire and water elementals; mortality; leaving one's hometown/comfort zone and entering the unknown; forgiveness; the three cycles of a woman's life; change; trust; doom; self-awareness; beating death; fighting back, fighting for what you want and believe in; the pain of having to be something you're not; looking for happiness in oneself instead of toward others; and experiencing the full range of human emotions, even painful ones like regret and loss.

All of this and more are crammed into an hour and a half! I could teach a course on *The Last Unicorn* but to parse the film down to its smallest, most sparkly and digestible part, then we need one line from the Molly Grue character: "You have all the power you need if you dare look for it!" A simple life lesson for people of all ages that still might need unraveling by critical thinkers and true believers alike, so allow my own inner Schmendrick the Magician [5] to assist: the deep power you do have also never ends, so be sure to use it often, consciously, and wisely.



NOT THAT IT MATTERS THE NEVERENDING STORY

STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

The Neverending Story was based on the book of the same name written by Michael Ende. An important fact to remember: this movie only tells the first half of the original novel. The second half of the novel was the basis for the movie's sequel, which came out in 1990 [1]. While *The Neverending Story* deals with themes like death and grief, it's a nice fantasy film fondly remembered by most people who saw it as a kid. This was my first viewing, so I didn't view it with a nostalgic lens, but I still enjoyed it.

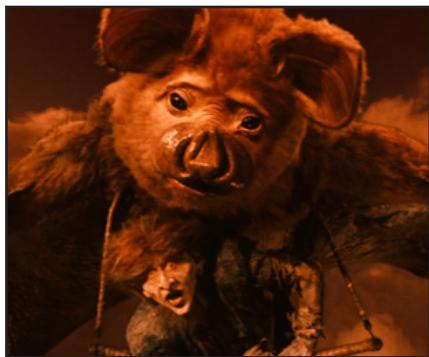
The Neverending Story begins with 10-year-old Bastian (Barret Oliver) telling his father, Barney (Gerald McRaney), that he had another dream about his recently deceased mother. Instead of comforting his son, Barney tells Bastian that he needs to get more serious about school, get over his fears, and stop daydreaming. Bastian reluctantly agrees, but it's obvious that his father's cold and unemotional reaction is disappointing.

On his way to school, Bastian is chased by bullies. In an attempt to hide, he ducks into an old bookstore where the proprietor, Mr. Coreander (Thomas Hill) is reading a book called *The Neverending Story*. When Bastian asks him about it, Coriander tells him it's not safe for him to read it. Bastian quickly lists off all the books he's read recently, but Coreander insists he shouldn't even think about reading this book. When Coreander steps away to answer a phone call, Bastian grabs the book, leaving a note saying he will return it when he's done.

Bastian heads to school, but instead of going to class, he hides out in the school attic so he can read the book. Once he begins, we are transported to the fictional land of Fantasia, which we soon learn is being destroyed by an invisible force called The Nothing. The Empress of Fantasia is sick, and the people believe that the only way to stop The Nothing is to find a cure for her. They



THE RECIPIE FOR EYE STRAIN.



WHAT A GREAT WAY TO GET AROUND.



THE SWAMP OF SADNESS IS VERY SAD.

summon Atreyu (Noah Hathaway), a young warrior, and tell him he must trek through Fantasia to find a cure. Atreyu and Artax, his trusty horse, accept the challenge and set out on their quest.

All throughout Atreyu's journey, the movie cuts back to Bastian sitting in the school attic reading the book. Scenes from the landscapes of Fantasia are interspersed with scenes from the dusty, dark attic, and Atreyu's interactions with Fantasia's many creatures are in contrast to Bastian's solitude. Eventually, it becomes clear to Bastian that the characters in the book are aware that he's reading their story, and he learns that they need his help to save Fantasia. Bastian doesn't understand how this is possible, but he needs to find a way to believe it in order to help them.

The bulk of this movie is spent trying to help Bastian deal with the death of his mother as the story in the book parallels his life with themes of grief and loss. The threat of The Nothing lurks throughout the movie, just like Bastian's fear of death and his struggle with grief. No one seems to acknowledge his grief, including his father, so feeling nothing (or feeling like nothing) as he tries to navigate his new reality is mirrored by this invisible, destructive force.

The Empress (the mother figure of Fantasia) is sick and at risk of death, just like Bastian's mother. And Atreyu is the representation of the boy Bastian wishes he could be. Atreyu is brave and

confident and sets out to save the Empress. Bastian couldn't save his mother, but maybe Atreyu, with Bastian's help, can save the Empress.

The first part of Atreyu's journey takes him through the boggy Swamp of Sadness. As he tries to make it through the unforgiving mud, his horse gets stuck and refuses to move. As Atreyu tries to pull Artax out of the mud, it becomes clear that Artax isn't going to make it. So, right at the beginning, Atreyu experiences grief, which gives Bastian an opportunity to see his own grief through Atreyu's loss.

In an article for Cinerama Film, Neil Baker argues that seeing grief through Atreyu's eyes helps Bastian deal with his own feelings. Baker says, "Atreyu manages to conquer the swamp's pain and provide Bastian with his first steps towards recovery. The loss of Artax is a vehicle by which Bastian can explore his own grief and the need to escape sadness" [2]. Also, this scene was brutal. If I had seen this as a kid, Artax's death would have haunted me for the rest of my life.

Throughout the story, Atreyu is pursued by Gmork, a wolf-like creature who is there to make sure The Nothing succeeds at destroying Fantasia. While Gmork never hurts Atreyu, he is a scary presence in the movie, lurking in shadows and stalking Atreyu. As Baker points out, "Gmork is the physical representation of death and 'the nothing' of grief, with each feeding off the other in the never-ending cycle of life and death" [3]. So, as Bastian realizes he



FALKOR THE MUPPET.



THE SHOCKINGLY YOUNG EMPRESS.



THE THREE BULLIES.

needs to help these characters save Fantasia, he becomes part of this cycle, and, hopefully, he accepts that dealing with death and loss is just a part of life.

I do have one beef with all of this. In the end, the Empress tells Bastian he can help rebuild Fantasia by making wishes, and the first thing Bastian wishes for is to ride on Falkor (the dragon pictured above and probably the most-recognized character from this movie) and scare his bullies. But, why wouldn't he wish for his mom to come back? The theme of acceptance of death is obviously an important one, but it would seem like a 10-year-old boy would understand the opportunity he has to wish his mother back to life. I don't know. Maybe that was his second wish.

Critical reviews of *The Neverending Story* were mixed. Roger Ebert liked this movie, and he compared some of the creatures to Muppets even saying some parts of this movie looked like *The Dark Crystal*, and I agree with his assessment [4]. Falkor especially looked like a Muppet, and Atreyu's journey reminded me of *Labyrinth* as he met different characters along the way.

One person who didn't like this movie was the novel's author, Michael Ende. He was originally excited that they were going to make a movie, and he sold the rights for only \$50K. He worked with Peterson on the script but later accused Peterson of rewriting it without telling him. Ende felt the script strayed too far from the original story

and demanded that production be shut down. When producers didn't shut it down, he sued them, but he ultimately lost the lawsuit [5].

According to People magazine, “[Ende] held an impassioned press conference in Stuttgart... to denounce ‘that revolting movie’ and demanded that his name be removed from the credits. It was. ‘The makers of the film simply did not understand the book at all,’ he complains. ‘They just wanted to make money’” [6] And they did make a bunch of money. The movie raked in \$100 million worldwide. In Germany, almost five million people saw it, which was huge at the time [7].

One final note, *The Neverending Story* has a cheesy opening song, which was performed by Christopher Hamil, who was the lead singer of Kajagoogoo, and Beth Anderson. The song hit #4 on the UK singles chart and #6 on the Billboard Adult Contemporary Chart. It was covered many times, but the cover I’m most familiar with was released by New Found Glory in 2000 [8].

All in all I liked this movie. Sometimes the special effects were cheesy, but for the most part they were par for the 80s. The kid actors were pretty good, and I really enjoyed the set of the school attic (although there were a bunch of unexplained taxidermied animals at that school). I definitely recommend it, but if you're watching with kids, watch out for the scene where the horse dies. It's pretty traumatic.



THE OTHER HARRY POTTER TROLL

DR. RHONDA BAUGHMAN

Of the two *Harry Potters*, this one came first: still magical, and starring alongside adorable singing trolls might trump starring alongside Robert Pattison. Once upon a time, Charles Band's Empire Pictures, predecessor firm to his Full Moon Productions, really knew how to deliver a big basket of puppets within a fairy tale picture. *Troll* (1986) is a riot: created by and starring legends [1], filmed in Italy in 1985, it's also an endearing, enchanted epic.

Of course, the film (that supposedly Roger Corman initially passed on) is not perfect. Yet, writers Ed Naha [2] and director John Carl Buechler create goofy charm and run with it, only occasionally offering a few hellishly irritating scenes, but no matter because overall they provide the puppet-fueled goods that I craved (then and now!) Theoretically, if one can avoid a hypercritical state for 82 minutes, then *Troll* is just a super fun movie

to sit back, absorb [3], revel and curl up within its warm, fuzzy blanket of puppetry effects!

Those lovable and painstakingly crafted creature effects [4] are *Troll*'s first dance that contain no missteps. Puppets, gross transition special effects [5], animatronics, stop motion animation, miniatures, operators, matte artists, and a whole tableau of additional talent and assistants created a fantastical world I fell in love with 35 years ago and remain enamored with today; *Troll* contains effects I don't see much in newer films (these traditional effects bring a magical hue that's difficult, if not impossible to capture with modern technology like CGI).

Additionally, there are certainly no blunders in the film's iconic score—such a lush and eerie, yet whimsical compilation of cantos from Charles



BETTER TO SEE YOU, MY DEAR.



TALKING TINA GOT NOTHING ON WENDY. HE'S GOT PLANS, SO YOU GOTTA SCRAM.



Band's brother Richard from beginning through end credits. Luckily for collectors like me, the original vinyl LP pressing and several re-pressings are available although for a decently bite-sized chunk of change. Legendary is the word that comes to mind when thinking of Band's ability to create tension with his work, marinating scenes in musical compositions I could never begin to create nor unravel, but I can appreciate on many levels.

Rated PG-13 (for language, a tense conversation about "what Death looks like", and some un-sexy antics from Sonny Bono [6]), *Troll* follows the Potter family on their first (and several early) move-in days to their new apartment (apparently also moving in on Walpurgis, or the Witches' Sabbath, when "denizens of the unknown cavort"). Young Harry Potter, Jr. (Noah Hathaway [7] or 'Atreyu' in *The Neverending Story* (1984)) is tasked with watching his younger sister Wendy—and he does.

Potter, Jr. watches her immediately bounce a ball out of his line of sight. Once the ominous Band music begins, there's no turning back: the real Wendy is sent into a magical slumber while Torok the Troll (ye owner of the magical, stabby-needle ring that allows him to appear as Wendy) [8] begins his mystical plan of revenge against the human race. Oh! and revenge against Eunice St. Clair, the witch who also lives in the apartment building (brilliantly played by both Anne and June Lockhart). Torok's "cosmic window" is short, so he must move quickly to transform

everyone in the complex into much less human, therefore, much more desirable tenants.

We do meet the building's inhabitants before Torok the Troll manages to stab most of them with his ring, and once stuck, they alchemically transform into a pod and then are reborn into lavish forest greenery and supernatural creatures that might appear to be mini-trolls, but seem (to me) more like fae [9], goblins, imps, elves, demons, and ogres, and with many snuffling due to egregious snot production. Bono's Peter Dickinson (all phallic references intended) is the first to go. Other tenant fodder includes Gary Sandy and William Hall, but let's talk about the elephant in the room: whatever happened to Jenny Beck?

As young Wendy Potter, her performance is energetic, bratty, loud, and often hilarious. According to her Wiki, her *Troll* performance earned her a Youth in Film Award nomination for best supporting actress in a film, comedy, fantasy, or drama. Only supporting? She carried the film as much as the mother-daughter Lockhart team and Phil Fondacaro. No offense intended to any veteran actors previously mentioned here, as well as Potter parents Anne and Harry, Sr. (Shelly Hack and Michael Moriarty, respectively).

Beck's innocent-little-girl-who's-really-an-evil troll routine is rather multi-layered and nuanced for a (max.) 11-year old and doubly comical next to the painfully superficial goofiness of her parents



HARRY POTTER LEARNS THE LORE.



AN ELOQUENT VISITOR.



THE FAIRYTALE COMES ALIVE.

and one-note brother/Hathaway performance. Beck looks like she's having fun, running amok, plotting and smirking as troll-in-disguise, but her acting credits stop in 1991 and the Internet yields little except that she's "alive and kicking" [10].

Just as much fun to watch as Beck's Wendy performance? English professor tenant Malcolm (Fondacaro) reciting Edmund Spenser's poem *The Faerie Queene* (1590) from memory at the Potter dinner table, as Torok-in-Wendy-form listens contentedly next to him, while the camera cuts to the frolicking puppet creatures in the apartments above him, singing and vocalizing in operatic rock fashion. It's glorious! I had no idea I could love this film more than I already did, but during this re-watch, I caught a human in a troll costume dancing behind the singing puppets. What I would give to find out who that was!

Also noted on this re-watch? One of Eunice St. Clair's gorgeous antique but garage sale style relics hanging in her apartment: I noted the wall portrait painting of Torok the Troll as a human and found he's modeled after master FX artist, *Troll* director John Carl Buechler and a sweet-faced, small goblin (the fish/toilet Ghoulie!) hovers in the painting top left. Cleverly, a young Eunice St. Clair is in the picture, but is initially blocked for the viewer by the older St. Clair's hair [11] for a later reveal.

Re-watching Torok the Troll in Wendy form ridding the building of humans to recreate his

beloved magical world instead with all his creature pals, many young Rhonda memories kicked in: unconsciously noticing the *Ghoulies* puppet similarities throughout; being jealous that Wendy/Torok could pet and forehead smooch her goblin pal and save a dying Professor of English Malcolm Malory by turning him into an adorable elf [12]; and young Rhonda loved Torok the troll, but didn't know how to make Torok love her as he did "Brother Elf" Malcolm, so she could avoid the ring-stab 'change-into-a-pod rebirthing into snotty creature' process. Because young Rhonda really wanted to be the witch!

"What do you do?" Harry, Jr. asks crone St. Clair when they first meet, and she responds, "Anything I damn well please." I knew right then what kind of woman I wanted to be when I grew up – and it was Eunice St. Clair! Graceful and brave, she who confidently hinted at her witchery well before Harry, Jr. guesses she's actually a witch. Who wouldn't want all her powers and knowledge, talent and apartment full of magickal artifacts [13]? And who wouldn't want her roommate and forever BFF: the singing, talking, cute, tiny-noise-making mushroom puppet Galwyn (once Eunice's teacher). Young Rhonda was ready to sign up for all of this. For everything mentioned above, even the war against Torok, if it meant also having magical puppet, goblin, and fungus friends. In the magickal spirit of full transparency, adult Rhonda is ready to sign up for all this, too.



COME ON, Y'ALL, LET'S TAKE A RIDE FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR

JANENE SCELZA & MATT SCELZA

Oh man, this movie takes us back. *Flight of the Navigator* was partly filmed in our neck of the woods: a summer South Florida locale (we're Central Florida natives). It was refreshing to land on *Flight of the Navigator*, too, after getting off to a rocky start trying to find movies to discuss in this issue; a sort of "third time's a charm" after the Australian mystery *The Quest* (aka, the unfortunately titled *Frog Dreaming*) and Joe Dante's *Explorers* proved egregiously thin on story.

Where there seems to be an abundance of scripted kids' fantasy and adventure fare involving magic or superheroes nowadays (no shade, just sayin'), the 80s had plenty of space-themed titles. Probably owing to the huge success of *ET* in the early 80s, and, at least to some degree, the prominence of the US Space Program, a lot of kid-friendly films at the time were either launching the youngins into space or having them befriend aliens. Randall Kleiser's 1986 sci-fi adventure film, *Flight of the Navigator*, does a bit of both, although much

of the former happens off-screen. (*Flight of the Navigator* was released in July, just a few weeks after another kiddie space movie: *Space Camp*).

Flight of the Navigator was in regular rotation during our childhood, but we hadn't seen it in years before our recent rewatch. And, while the film is certainly dated — and maybe that's forgivable to young audiences who are now so enamored with the 80s aesthetic (thanks, *Stranger Things*) — we are willing to bet that young kids today will still have plenty to enjoy about the movie. (Surely, we can predict these things! In the timeless words of Principal Richard Clark from *High School High*, we know "what's hip, what's cool, what's straight up boo-tee").

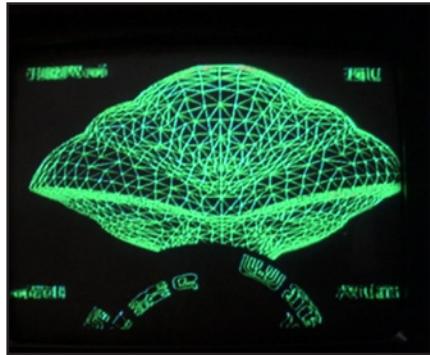
The story begins in 1978. Twelve-year old David Freeman (Joey Cramer), the titular Navigator, chases his obnoxious little brother through the woods at night. He loses his footing and gets knocked unconscious. When David comes to, it only seems like a short while later, but then David returns



DAVID DREAMS OF DOG FRISBEE GOLD.



SOMETHING SEEMS.... OFF.



BEHIND THE SCENES ONSCREEN.

home to find everything is different. There are strangers in his house that now has yuppie pastel decor. Detectives at the police station notice something weird about the missing person report they found. His parents (Bruce Greenwood and Veronica Cartwright) are suddenly older, and his young brother is now technically his older brother (Matt Adler). Turns out eight years have passed. Everything has changed but David. It's a great setup.

David's disappearance might be connected to a floating UFO that crashed into some power lines. An old security guard, clueless as to what it was, found it. NASA runs some tests. The lead scientist, played by the excellent Howard Hesseman, pleads with David's family to let his team run some tests on the boy. It may be the only way to get answers on where he's been all this time and why he hasn't aged. They just need 48 hours, pretty please!

If science fiction films and TV shows have taught us anything, it's that you can't trust even the nicest folks in lab coats if you have made unexpected trips to space or been anywhere in the vicinity of aliens, and David did both. But, David's parents agree to the 48-hours testing period.

At the lab, David gets his own room and a load of toys, and he discovers something called MTV and Twisted Sister (his last concert was the Bee-Gees). A cool, punky girl (Sarah Jessica Parker) delivers food in the most unnecessarily hi-tech way. But, then he gets hooked to a bunch of machines, and the computers start going haywire.

The scientists need more time and also some privacy as they've got whispering and side-eye to do while David looks understandably confused.

But, the kid's got spunk. He plots with the cool, punky girl to escape, and the benevolent UFO carries him away as lab security fumbles into action to try and stop them. The sequences with the spacecraft still look great after all these years: the exterior renderings, the vast metallic interior, and parts of the ship turning transparent. As it turns out, this was no piddly production anyways. The SFX team (including the director's brother, Jeff) had to figure out reflective mapping in a day and age when the technology was far more limited both in processing power and software capability.

Flight of the Navigator was also the first film to use digital morphing. This was the same technique that wowed *Terminator 2* audiences in the early 90s when Robert Patrick transformed into walking (or more often, running) Liquid Metal. In keeping with the devotion to tech, composer Alan Silvestri, fresh off of *Back to the Future*, composed a fully synth soundtrack for *Flight of the Navigator*. The opening track in particular makes us heavily nostalgic for the SEGA *Road Rash* games.

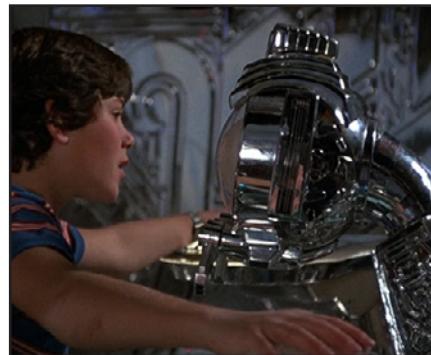
SFX fans: if you want a really good behind-the-scenes look at the film, check out Captain Disillusion's (Alan Melikdjanian) excellent video detailing the cinematic magic behind the spaceship [1]. It's about halfway into the picture that we get the space and aliens. The friendly alien of the tale



VISUAL INSPIRATION FOR HOWLING 3?



IT'S ABSOLUTELY FASCINATING.



DAVID AND HIS BUD, MAX.

is a cycloptic robot named Max (voiced by Paul Rubens who was credited under another name — this was several years before the big scandal — but he slips in the trademark Pee Wee chuckle as a wink and a nod to knowing viewers). There's great chemistry between hoity-toity Max and the 12-year boy who still has things to teach him.

Max travels to other planets in search of biological specimens to study. The assortment of cute and strange creatures include David. Max normally returns his specimens to the time and place he found them, but in David's case, he worried that it would be too dangerous. The pair make a pact to get each other home.

The second half of the movie is road-trip fun as David has to figure out how to get home (no easy task if you've never had to lead the way before, especially with a spaceship you've never commanded before), all while trying to escape the G-Men and coordinate with David's family to signal when he close. (File under 80s movie plots that would be easily resolved with modern tech).

He gets to play with a spaceship and zip into the air, cruise over the ocean, and there's even a great sequence where he parks the craft at a rural gas station for a potty break while one customer remarks about cool roadside attractions and a gas station attendant is at a loss for words. There's the adventure hook for young kids — the unsupervised young character who gets to do some cool shit with a spaceship. Can we have a go, too?

It's an interesting story that goes from something like a wild *Twilight Zone* tale to fun kid-friendly about a boy and his alien pals. This was the result of two studios with different goals — Disney for a family-friendly film, and PSO Productions (aka, the unsexily named Producers Sales Organization Productions) for a thrilling action movie — reaching a compromise [2]. It's an 80's miracle!

Hey, speaking of 80s movie plots that can be solved by modern tech, Disney has been trying to remake the film for almost 15 years. Brad Copeland (*Arrested Development*) was first slated to write. In 2012, the director Colin Trevorrow and writer/producer Derek Connolly were considered, and who knows, the *Safety Not Guaranteed* duo might've done some interesting things. In 2017, “remake” became “reboot” and Lionsgate/Henson and Oats Studios threw their hats in the ring. In late 2021, Bryce Dallas Howard announced plans to direct a straight-to-streaming (Disney+) version with a young female protagonist (can't wait to see all the angry ratings by non-viewers on Rotten Tomatoes ...).

If the FilmAffinity placeholder is any indication, the Dallas-Howard version releases this year (2023). While we tend to be reboot- and remake-adverse (so much meh), we would be interested to see how this particular story holds up in a modern setting. In the meantime, *Flight of the Navigator* is (as of this writing) available to stream on Disney+. Tell the youngins!



CHASING ACORNS MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO

ED CASH

When did you stop believing in spirits?

I probably hung on to the typical American childhood beliefs—Santa Claus, Tooth Fairy, Easter Bunny—a little longer than the average kid. Not to my friends and in social settings, of course (the peer pressure to be “too old to believe in that stuff” was real), but personally, privately, and no doubt partially in an enduring hope of selfish self-gain but also out of a certain reverence and will, as if my belief alone could maintain their true existence. But soon enough I grew up. I embraced science and reason. I enlightened myself in the best traditions of Western civilization, turned my back on religion (organized or otherwise), and embraced a mechanical, physical world.

My Neighbor Totoro unfolds in my world, but also a world resolutely populated by the creatures and phenomena that I have long since rejected. Kids and adults alike accept that spirits and ghosts in-

habit everything, from creaky old homes to magnificent trees in the forest. And they do, without question. We have no reason to doubt that anything from dust sprites to a giant cat in the shape of a bus—actually observed only by the film’s two child protagonists, tenish-year-old Satsuki and fourish-year-old Mei—are real inhabitants of the world.

“Totoro”, by the way, is just Mei’s mispronunciation of the Japanese word for “Troll”, tororu [1]. When the girls tell their parents and kindly neighbor, “Granny,” about the spirits they meet, the adults don’t patronize. Instead, they matter-of-factly accept that dust mites inhabit the home, or that Totoro inhabit the nearby forest. Little Mei might be too young to know the difference, but Satsuki would know if the adults were being patronizing. And indeed, adults are regularly present in scenes with the spirits. They just seem to be too busy to notice. Nobody doubts that such supernatural beings exist, and several scenes depict young and



HEY, HEY, WAIT A MINUTE MR. POSTMAN.



WHY ARE ACORNS IN THE HOUSE?



IN THE COMPANY OF SPRITES.

old performing rituals to acknowledge and thank the spirits and ask for their protection. We see a sincere expression of Shinto ideology—and the harmony and stability it begets for the world [2].

This world, though, can and does change suddenly. While Satsuki goes off to school, Mei sees two little Totoros (stout, fuzzy, pointy-eared forest spirits) marching through the backyard. She chases them through a maze of thicket at the base of the great camphor tree that towers over their home, before she drops accidentally—or not—upon a slumbering giant Totoro. After some wordless-back-and-forth, she joins its naptime. But when she awakens and tries to return with Satsuki and her dad, the nest has disappeared. Satsuki later meets the giant Totoro and gifts him an umbrella, much to his delight on a rainy night. In return, Totoro gives the girls a bag of acorns, and the girls dutifully plant them. That night, they join their Totoro friends to work together in dance to sprout the seeds into an enormous tree, all in a matter of seconds. The next morning, only the tiny sprouts remain—to the girls' continued delight. The natural world grows and shrinks, appears and disappears. It doesn't bother anyone too much.

Other elements of life have changed suddenly for Satsuki and Mei. The movie opens with the two girls moving with their dad into an old, empty, dust-sprite-filled home in the country: a new home, a new environment (the family previously lived a much more urban life), new school, new friends. But unlike the spoiled pouting of *Spirited Away*'s Chihiro (certainly no older than plucky Satsuki),

the two sisters gleefully embrace this new adventure. They enjoy exploring the spooky new house and perform their chores dutifully, even cheerfully. Life proceeds in peaceful, bucolic, joyful harmony.

Wait—where is their mom?

We find out in the second act that Satsuki and Mei's mom is convalescing in a country hospital, explaining the family's move to the nearby village. The movie never specifies the illness. Kids don't know those details—nor do they care. What matters is that mom is sick, but should be getting better and coming home soon. This is the story's conflict, and leads to the plot's climax, such as it exists. But (spoiler!) this is a thoroughly family-friendly movie, and everything turns out for the best, with a little help from the forest spirits, or "Totoro," that the two girls have befriended.

Acorns are also ever-present, and always signal an upcoming catalyst. They fall down the stairs of the old house as Satsuki and Mei explore it for the first time and first interact with the dust spirits. Mei is hunting for acorns when she sees the tiny Totoros for the first time. And the big Totoro gifts a bagful of acorns to the girls in return for their kindness, solidifying a friendship that will ultimately save the day.

The messages are plain, simple, and beautiful: we can (and ought to) build a friendship with nature. Kindness does not just beget kindness, it multiplies it. Opportunities to grow—like the immense potential contained in a tiny acorn—



GOOD DEEDS REWARDED WITH ACORNS.



NEVER REALLY ALONE.



PEEKING IN AT THE HOSPITAL.

abound all around us, if we only look for them.

My Neighbor Totoro certainly hits me every time I see it. There is no great obvious moral to the story, but Writer-Director Hayao Miyazaki's themes are clear: spend a little more time outdoors. Pay a little more attention to the world around you. Find joy in the smallest pockets around you every day. For a guy who yells at traffic and angrily curses computer failures too often, such simple reminders give me pause. I'm not sure I quite believe in spirits—yet—but I've done a little more breathing, a little more listening, and a little more observing since my latest zine-watch.

It took eight animators just eight months to create *Totoro* [3]. That's nearly impossible to believe. The movie is gorgeous. Every frame, richly detailed and purposefully styled, reflects the same appeal to purposefulness that infuses the script. With animated computer-generated films now involving hundreds of programmers and years of production (hard look your way, Disney-Pixar), *Totoro*'s appeal to the joys of the natural, human, and animistic resonates even more today than it did in the 80s.

Studio Ghibli released *My Neighbor Totoro* in Japan in 1988 as a double feature alongside *Grave of the Fireflies*, a complete mirror in tone but similarly perceived through the eyes of its young protagonists. The studio's gamble was actually on *Totoro*. *Fireflies* adapted a popular semi-autobiographical novel from 1967, and was a sure hit [4] but its counterpart has proven to be the legacy film, with its titular character now Studio Ghibli's mas-

cot. (Special hint to the parents out there: watch *Totoro* with the kids, but put off *Fireflies* until they're teenagers. Maybe *Girls, On Film* will feature *Fireflies* in a future "Soul-Crushing Movies About How Children Are Brutalized By War" edition.)

Troma Films (producers of other memorable family-favorite 80s flicks like *The Toxic Avenger*, *Surf Nazis Must Die*, and *Rabid Grannies*) brought the movie to American theaters in 1993, and Fox released a VHS shortly thereafter (and DVD in 2002) [5]. Disney produced a new dub in 2004, featuring sisters Dakota and Elle Fanning age-appropriately as Satsuki and Mei. It's the easiest version to find today, streaming on HBO Max. GKIDS took over U.S. rights to Studio Ghibli in 2017 [6], and must have made a sweet deal with Daddy HBO as all Ghibli films screen there as of this writing.

As seems to be the case with many of the flicks featured in *Girls, On Film*, it bears noting that *My Neighbor Totoro* got its own stage production. The Royal Shakespeare Company is completing its run as of this writing. Critics [7] love [8] it [9], and so do audiences—presale tickets set records and performances sold out. Maybe we'll get a chance to see it stateside soon?

If the stage show does come to a town near me, you'll find me in the audience. In the meantime, I'm going to be spending a little more time trying to be kind, expressing my thanks to the world around me, and chasing acorns.



WHAT A THRILL **TROOP BEVERLY HILLS**

STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

Troop Beverly Hills is a great choice for a family movie night because it's fun, silly, and relatable for both kids and adults. I watched this movie over and over as a kid. Since I was a Girl Scout, I really enjoyed the ridiculous antics of the fictional Wilderness Girls. Overall, this is an enjoyable movie with a nice message about believing in yourself wrapped up in some crazy 80s fashion.

Troop Beverly Hills begins with an awesome animated sequence by John Kricfalusi, the creator of *Ren and Stimpy*. After that, we get a glimpse into the crumbling marriage of wealthy Beverly Hills couple Phyllis (Shelley Long) and Freddy Nefler (Craig T. Nelson). Freddy tells her that she squandered her potential and that her ambitions have been replaced by a serious shopping habit. To show him that she's willing to follow through on a project, Phyllis decides to lead Hannah's (their daughter, played by Jenny Lewis) Wilderness Girls (WG) troop.

Once Phyllis tailors the awful, khaki troop-leader uniform, she heads to a Wilderness Girls meeting where she meets the movie's villain: Velda Plendor (Betty Thomas). Velda is former military, and she takes the Wilderness Girls very seriously. She despises Phyllis and her Beverly Hills way of life, and she tries to make Phyllis's time with the Wilderness Girls as difficult as possible.

Phyllis, to her credit, keeps the troop running despite the fact that all the girls are dealing with some heavy stuff. From divorces, to absent parents, to financial issues, they're all struggling with grown-up problems despite coming from a place of financial privilege. Phyllis gets them motivated by teaching them to survive in the wilds of Beverly Hills. They earn badges in things like jewelry appraisal, they have a star-studded fundraiser to sell cookies, and a rained out camping trip turns into a night at the Beverly Hills Hotel.



BEVERLY HILLS REPORTING FOR DUTY.



TURNS OUT HIKING IS NOT FUN.



80S WORKOUT GEAR IS JUST GREAT.

Velda does everything she can to get troop Beverly Hills kicked out of the Wilderness Girls, but despite her efforts, Phyllis and her crew qualify to participate in the annual WG Jamboree, which is a multi-day competition to navigate the actual wilderness and cross the finish line first. Phyllis will have to survive without her usual creature comforts and guide the troop through the woods to prove to Velda, Freddie, and herself that she is something more than a shopaholic housewife.

Troop Beverly Hills is delightfully silly, but most critics didn't like it. Roger Ebert said, "the movie does not think Beverly Hills is funny. It sees nothing wrong with devout materialism. It has no sense of the ridiculous" [1]. Ebert is wrong, the movie does mock the social elite of 90210. Just look at Phyllis's outfits and her ridiculous ideas for badges. Other reviewers criticized the movie for making the rich kids the underdog, which I get, but I think these criticisms missed the point.

The girls in *Troop Beverly Hills* might have posh lifestyles, but the movie makes clear that having money doesn't prevent them from having real-life problems. All of these kids are mature beyond their age because they were forced to be. Chica's parents are routinely leaving her home alone while they travel the world, even missing her birthday. Emily is well aware that her family is struggling financially. And more than one of the girls is dealing with their parents' divorce, including Hannah, who seems to be the most adult person in the Nefler household.

They all eventually take to the Wilderness Girls because they feel like it's a safe place, and the girls start to look to Phyllis as a mother and caretaker. When Chica's parents ditch her on her birthday, she shows up crying at the Nefler house. When Emily can't afford the patches, she eventually tells Phyllis about her family's issues. They all start to look to Phyllis as an adult they can trust, which shows how Phyllis creates a supportive atmosphere within the troop.

Phyllis also proves to everyone that her homemaking and socializing wasn't all for naught. Freddy tells her she has amounted to nothing but a shopaholic, but really, she's been honing her people skills and her parenting abilities to rise to an occasion just like this. In an article for The Mary Sue, Chelsea Steiner says, "Phyllis's unpaid emotional labor is treated like a joke by Freddy, until we see what her work accomplishes: raising money for charity, parenting the ignored girls of her troop, and using her connections to sell a record amount of cookies" [2].

Phyllis isn't stupid. She knows what she's good at and she leverages her connections to help the girls while remaining true to herself. She teaches her troop to help their community (they volunteer at a nursing home), to be proud of their accomplishments (they have a patch ceremony to celebrate with their parents), and to be kind to others (they help Velda when she's injured during the Jamboree). Furthermore, Phyllis knows Velda is messing with her, but she never stoops to Velda's level; instead she finds other ways to help her troop succeed.



VILLIAN VELDA.



LIFESTYLES OF THE WILDERNESS GIRLS.



A PATCH WORTHY APPRAISAL.

While critics were concerned with the focus on shopping, jewelry, and fashion, they missed the message that being true to yourself and believing in yourself can take you a long way. For Phyllis and the girls, it eventually leads them into a situation way outside their comfort zone where they rely on teamwork, persistence, and a new-found self confidence to succeed. It's a nice little feminist message, which is surprising coming from a Jeff Kanew film. He also directed *Revenge of the Nerds*, which is a super sexist movie (you can read more about it in Issue 18).

Shelly Long is great as Phyllis. She's funny and relatable, and I always find myself rooting for her. One of the best parts of her character is her outrageous 80s wardrobe. "There are massive sleeves, feathered hats, capes, and polka dots a-plenty." [3]. All of her outfits were accompanied by a constantly lit cigarette, which she held in a fancy cigarette holder. Eh, it was the 80s.

The cast also featured several young actors who eventually became stars in their own right, including Kelly Martin, who plays Emily, and Tori Spelling, who has a small role as part of the rival WG troop. Jenny Lewis would go on to star in a few other movies before retiring from acting to focus on her music career. She fronted the band Rilo Kiley, was a member of The Postal Service, and has an accomplished solo career. Lewis references her acting career (and this movie in particular) in her music video for "She's Not Me" [4].

While the rest of the actors in the WG troop are a diverse bunch, which is great to see, some of their characters fall prey to stereotypes. For example, the AV club points out that "Lily's (Aquilina Soriano) parents are dictators modeled after Philippine first couple Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos, so one of her skills is money laundering" [5]. Furthermore, the Neflers' maid Rosa, played by Shelley Morrison who was Rosario on *Will and Grace*, makes a birthday burrito to celebrate Chica's birthdays. It's cringy but not unexpected from a movie of this era.

And, like most other movies made in the 80s, there is talk of a remake. In 2020, Variety reported that Sony had ordered a sequel. According to the article, "The sequel's screenplay is from Aeysha Carr, the showrunner of *Woke* who is currently writing Paramount's reboot of *Planes, Trains & Automobiles*...The original film was based on the life of Ava Fries, who served as producer and will return to the sequel as executive producer with Charles W. Fries" [6]. Unfortunately, both Charles and Ava Fries died in 2021 (he was 92 she was 87), so I'm not sure where this movie stands now.

No matter what happens with the sequel, the original movie will always reign supreme because I'm not sure who else could play Phyllis Nefler as well as Shelley Long. So, this movie is definitely worth a watch, and keep an eye out for the scene where Phyllis teaches the girls to dance. Watching them all do the Freddy is pretty hilarious.



SIZE MATTERS

HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS

JANENE SCELZA & MATT SCELZA

80s kids know *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*. 90s kids probably do, too. The family adventure film was a huge hit when it was released to theaters in the summer of 1989, naturally spawning a franchise that overstayed its welcome. In the first film, nerdy inventor Wayne Szalinski (played by the lovable Rick Moranis) accidentally shrinks his kids and the neighbor's kids. Next, Wayne turns his toddler son into a giant (*Honey, I Blew Up the Kid*). In a third, direct-to-video installment, the adults get shrunk (*Honey, We Shrunk Ourselves*). This followed with a late 90s TV series where the kids were shrunk again for three seasons (*Honey, I Shrunk the Kids: The TV Show*). Finally, news came out that Rick Moranis was coming out of retirement to do a reboot with Josh Gad (*Shrunk*) [1].

Our concern, of course, is the movie that started it all: *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*. (TBH, we don't remember much about the 1992 sequel and can't vouch for the rest of the film franchise. But we did

do the Disney rides! More on that later.) 80s kids, and probably 90s kids, might already have *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* on their list of films to share with their own kids. The movie is definitely worth a revival. Not a reboot, mind you, but a revival! It's the kind of film — something with a little magic and science and adventures, and not too sappy (for a Disney film) or dated (for an 80s movie heavy on practical effects... pour one in the floor) — that kids are still very much likely to enjoy. (With the physical copies of the movie, you got a two-fer: the *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* movie was preceded by the so-so animated Roger Rabbit short *Tummy Trouble*).

Interestingly, Joe Johnston's family adventure film was the brainchild of three horror writers: Stuart Gordon, Brian Yunza, and Ed Naha, the trio behind the 1987 horror movie, *Dolls*. (Naha also wrote the screenplay for *Troll*, covered in this issue). Supposedly, the early *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* script



WILLIAM TELL 2.0.



BIG RUSS: TEENAGERS, AMIRIGHT??!



WASCALLY WABBIT RON THOMPSON

was pretty dark; a five-child ensemble dwindles to four when one dies in a run through the sprinklers while in shrink (shrunk?) mode. Disney wasn't too happy. Gordon told the AV Club: "After we sent the first draft of the treatment to Disney, we got a note back saying, 'Please make this more like *The Absent-Minded Professor* and less like *The Fly*" [2].

It's too bad Disney wanted to get that cutesy with it, because even with the family-film angle, the story — an eccentric inventor's ray gun accidentally shrinks four kids to less than the size of an ant — had the potential for some wonderful *Eerie, Indiana* style weirdness. We love that kind of stuff. There are hints of it here, but only hints.

Honey, I Shrunk the Kids is set in a seemingly typical Middle American suburb ironically, constructed at a studio backlot in Mexico City. Here, our main characters, two pairs of nuclear families with the mom and dad, two kids, and pets, live. The running observation appears to be that everyone's family is a little weird, but it's "weird" in that Disney sense, meaning just a tad oddball. This is nowhere near the kind of satire about suburban America you'd find in, say, a Tim Burton or Joe Dante film out of that decade. Not that it matters. Young kids aren't likely to care much about the innocuous messaging, anyways. The hook here is 100% the action and adventure.

The movie opens at the Szalinski house. Son Nick (Robert Oliveri), the spitting image of inventor dad Wayne, plays with his creations (including a miniature ray gun replica), while teenage daugh-

ter, Amy (Amy O'Neil) gabs on the phone with her friend about a date she has that night. Momma Szalinski (Marcia Strassman) is elsewhere, frustrated by her husband's fixation on his shrinking/growing machine that he's planning to present to a group of scientists. Wayne doesn't have a whole lot of time for other things right now.

Next door, the blue collar Thompsons are preparing for a weekend fishing trip. Family patriarch Big Russ (Matt Frewer, perhaps best known in the 80s as Max Headroom, though we loved him as the clueless principal in National Lampoon's Senior Trip), and homely wife, Mae (Kristine Sutherland), do their own fixating: they're packing for the non-refundable weekend by the lake with Big Russ's fishing buddy. Their youngest Thompson son Ron (played by one of our favorite 80's rascals, Jared Rushton -- hi if you're reading this!) causes mischief, while his less-than-enthused brother, Russ, Jr. (Thomas Wilson Brown), lightly butts heads with his dad.

The action begins when Ron accidentally hits a baseball through the Szalinski's attic window, triggering Wayne's finicky machine, which zaps the kids who show up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

These are the kind of family adventure films that seemed like a lot of fun to make. A blade of grass becomes an awesome slide. An abandoned cookie is a huge pile of frosting. A stop motion mechanical prop bug carries the children to safety. This, along with James Horner's bright musical score (and the very busy sound editing team) reminds us of



FUN-SIZED FAMILY!



WAYNE GOT SOME 'SPLAINING TO DO.



THE BIG MOMENT.

the grand pirate ship finale in *The Goonies*. There's even a similar teenage romance as soft-spoken Casanova, Little Russ, saves Amy from danger.

Audiences had a chance to experience the action first-hand with simulator rides at Epcot and Disney parks in Tokyo and Paris (*Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*). (The 3D movie was directed by Randall Kleiser, who did *Flight of the Navigator*). We preferred the lower-tech immersion: a playground constructed at Hollywood Studios (now MGM) that was designed to look like a slice of the Szalinski family's backyard. (Check out Yesterland's photos [3]). (Surprisingly, the 3-D movie and the playground lasted up until a few years ago, closing in 2010 and 2016, respectively) [4].

Just as in the 3D movie, the kids in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* face non-stop obstacles, everything from pets, to insects (including a thrilling *Argonauts* style battle between an ant and a scorpion), a lawn mower, and even parents who are briefly unaware of their microscopic progeny. Eventually, Wayne starts to piece together why the couches are curiously missing from the attic and what it has to do with his kids and the neighbors' kids being AWOL all day. Suddenly, the dad who didn't have much time for his kids springs into action, donning all kinds of strange contraptions to aid in the search (hence, lot of those "weird family" remarks). Soon, he has to tell his wife and the understandably worried Thompson parents what happened, establishing a new fixation for all: rescue.

Of course, it all works out in the end. The clashing families, both kids and adults, come together to

save the day, and we conclude the story with generic morals about different strokes for different folks (and that's OK!), and the importance of family (particularly the fatherly relationships). Again, it's such a fun, silly little film, young viewers are hardly going to bat an eye at the innocuous messaging.

The summer of 1989 was a good one for Rick Moranis, who quietly left the acting biz in the early 90s after his wife died. Along with *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, he would also reprise his role as Louis Tully for a *Ghostbusters* sequel and co-star in Ron Howard's wry comedy, *Parenthood*.

HISTK (to borrow one IMDB commentator's acronym) came out the same weekend as Tim Burton's first Batman film, and though the masked avenger blew all the competition out of the water, *Honey I Shrunk* still fared pretty well. Critical reception was kind of lukewarm (not negative, but not madly excited, either) but, it was an audience favorite. Disney had a new single-week record, previously held by *Three Men and a Baby*, and the movie was both the studio's highest grossing live-action film for five years and the sixth-highest grossing home video of 1990 [5]. It was only natural to follow with a never-ending franchise, and nowadays, the reboot treatment (the aforementioned Josh Gad project).

Like a few other films discussed in this issue, *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* is (as of this writing) can be found on Disney+. Why not make it an early night, double feature picture show (with *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*) Woah-oah-oah.

ENDNOTES

FOR JUSTICE, FOR FREEDOM, FOR HONESTY: THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER

Release Date: June 26, 1981

Written by: Tom Patchett, Jay Tarses, Jerry Juhl, & Jack Rose

Directed by: Jim Henson

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] The Great Muppet Caper. (Wikipedia)

<https://tinyurl.com/3pw7nku5>

[2] "Great Muppet Caper Week: The Road to England."

(Toughpigs.com, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/mu64v28u>

[3] "Great Muppet Caper Week: Debauchery at the Dubonnet Club." (Toughpigs.com,

2016) <https://tinyurl.com/y7ftb6m8>

[4] "With Charles Grodin's Death, Hollywood's Greatest Romance Comes to an End." (Slate,

2021) <https://tinyurl.com/kx6px76d>

[5] "Great Muppet Caper Week: Nicky Holiday's Great Muppet Mystery." (Toughpigs.com, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/k6a35a24>

[6] "RIP Great Muppet Caper Star Charles Grodin." (Toughpigs.com, 2021) <https://tinyurl.com/363beew6>

[7] "Charles Grodin Finally Reveals His Brief Tryst With Miss Piggy." (Vulture, 2011) <https://tinyurl.com/5n6r72h9>

[8] The Great Muppet Caper. (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/3pw7nku5>

[9] Ibid.

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS? THE LAST UNICORN

Release Date: November 19, 1982

Written by: Peter S. Beagle

Directed by: Arthur Rankin Jr. & Jules Bass

Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] Based on his 1968 book and found streaming for free on Tubi!

[2] aka, Amanda Plummer's mom

[3] Truly, nothing ends with exception to my patience, apparently. But works from people like Antoine Lavoisier, Alan Moore, Alan Watts, Dr. Carolyn Elliot, and many other various spiritual/faith-based and mythology-oriented texts (none pithy) provided me with the foundation to intuitively believe that line: "nothing ever ends."

[4] (I saw it at 5 years old).

[5] He answered our beloved Unicorn's central question with his pithy "nothing ever ends" so then, if this includes our Unicorn and her lineage, why would our Unicorn be the last?

NOT THAT IT MATTERS: THE NEVERENDING STORY

Release Date: July 20, 1984

Written by: Wolfgang Peterson & Herman Weigel

Directed by: Wolfgang Peterson

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] The Neverending Story (film). Wikipedia. <https://tinyurl.com/yhak4xzb>

[2] Baker, Neil. "The NeverEnding Story (1984) – a Fantasia of Grief and Recovery." (Cineramafilm.com, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/mu2hrm7j>

[3] Ibid.

[4] "The Neverending Story" (RogerEbert.com, 1984) <https://tinyurl.com/3tk3rfvt>

[5] The Neverending Story (film). Wikipedia. <https://tinyurl.com/yhak4xzb>

[6] "An Irate Michael Ende Blasts the 'Disgusting' Film Made from His Best-Seller, 'The Neverending

Story." (People, 1984) <https://tinyurl.com/mr3pvwe6>
[7] The Neverending Story (film). Wikipedia.
<https://tinyurl.com/yhak4xzb>

Ibid.

[8] [VIDEO] New Found Glory – “Neverending Story” <https://tinyurl.com/y6rtt5z4>

THE OTHER HARRY POTTER: TROLL

Release Date: January 17, 1986
Written by: Ed Naha and Oliver Gonzalez
Directed by: John Carl Buechler
Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] So many industry legends (many of whom we've lost just in the last few years) that I don't have the space here to offer the complex and intriguing details of their careers, alongside personal perspective, stories, and synchronicities.

[2] Writer for the 5-star magical puppet fest *Dolls* (1986). IMDB trivia notes Buechler created the story for *Troll* as well but is uncredited. *Troll's* trivia on IMDB? A hilarious hodgepodge of items that deserve a book on their own.

[3] WOW – and absorb how much this rewatch provided insight into a few life choices I've made. The subconscious rules everything, man.

[4] Director and story writer Buechler (RIP, 1952-2019) is also the mastermind behind many of the creature effects and the leader of MMI, (Makeup and Mechanical Imagery later known as Magical Media Industries), the team of which included Howard Berger (the 'B' of KNB) and the legendary Cleve Hall (RIP, 1959-2021) as fabricators on this film.

[5] One of the grossest that also scared me as a kid – courtesy of FX legend John Vulich (RIP, 1961-2016) of TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) fame!

[6] As a kid I thought “swinging” meant, you know, an actual playground swing would be involved. Although he's not given long to caper about in the film, Bono remains well-known to an Xennial like me for his adventures in music, film, and politics, and certainly his untimely death in 1998, as well

[7] His father Robert Hathaway also makes a brief appearance in the film billed as “First Policeman”.

[8] The Troll in Torok form is the brilliant Phil Fondacaro in a dual role.

[9] Including Julia-Louise Dreyfuss as a nymph in her first film role that, according to internet chatter, she'd rather not talk about, but I dug her performance here overall.

[10] deadorkicking.com/jenny-beck-dead-or-alive NOT the same as Broadway-star Jennifer Beck: variety.com/2015/legit/news/jennifer-rae-beck-dead-1201573588

[11] THIS painting now hangs in Charles Band's Cleveland-based Full Moon Mansion (FMM) and furthermore this Troll painting w/the cute hidden fish/toilet ghoulie hangs in the FMM bedroom *Ghoulies 2* star William Butler would sleep in when he and Brinke Stevens gave me part of the tour of the FMM while they worked on *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama 2* (and I visited the set) in late September 2022, as producer and director, respectively.

[12] Wendy calls him Brother Elf because he is a little person – and synchronistically, Fondacaro would battle some of the same puppets again when he starred in *Ghoulies 2* (1987).

[13] Note to the merchandizing department: we don't need the magical staffs, swords, trumpets, and general décor, but we do need the illustrated fairytale book and replica painting of young Eunice, hovering toilet/fish Ghoulie and human form Torok.

COME ON, Y'ALL, LET'S TAKE A RIDE: FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR

Release date: July 30, 1986
Directed by: Randall Kleiser
Written by: Mark H. Baker, Michael Burton, & Phil Joanou
Essay by: Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza
[1] [VIDEO] Captain Disillusion - "Flight of the Navigator | VFXcool" <https://tinyurl.com/y6rtt5z4>

[2] Ibid.

CHASING ACORNS: MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO

Release Date: April 16, 1986

Written by: Hayao Miyazaki

Directed by: Hayao Miyazaki

Essay by: Ed Cash

- [1] "The Hayao Miyazaki Web, Tonari no Totoro (My Neighbor Totoro) FAQ: What is Totoro?"
<https://tinyurl.com/yc8rshsk>

- [2] "Miyazaki's Shinto themes." (Green Shinto, 2014) <https://tinyurl.com/3pxpswb9>

- [3] "The Hayao Miyazaki Web, Tonari no Totoro (My Neighbor Totoro) FAQ: What is Totoro? : I heard that it was double-featured with "Grave of the Fireflies" in Japan. Is this true?"
<https://tinyurl.com/mf8nthdw>

- [4] "Studio Ghibli co-founder teases Hayao Miyazaki's next 'big, fantastical' film." (Entertainment Magazine, 2020)
<https://tinyurl.com/yckuy7mc>

- [5] "50th Street Films" (Audiovisual Identity Database). <https://tinyurl.com/3tkmfhk4>

- [6] "GKIDS Takes Over U.S. Studio Ghibli Distribution From Disney." (Kotaku, 2017) <https://tinyurl.com/2hwk7jt7>

- [7] "My Neighbour Totoro theatre review — five-star staging of a much-loved film at the Barbican." (Financial Times) <https://tinyurl.com/ydaxyedm>

- [8] "My Neighbour Totoro review – dazzling staging of the Studio Ghibli classic." (The Guardian, 2022)
<https://tinyurl.com/y5f9e93f>

- [9] "'My Neighbour Totoro' review: Bring this Miyazaki stage show to Broadway" (New York Post, 2022), <https://tinyurl.com/3yfbmmkm>

WHAT A THRILL: TROOP BEVERLY HILLS

Release Date: March 24, 1989

Written by: Ava Ostern Fries (story), Pamela Norris and Margaret Oberman (screenplay)

Directed by: Jeff Kanew

Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

- [1] "Troop Beverly Hills" Rogerebert.com, 1989. <https://tinyurl.com/4y4pkjsj>

- [2] "Top 5 Reasons Why Troop Beverly Hills Remains a Cult Classic." (The Mary Sue, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/5253b844>

- [3] Ibid.

- [4] Ibid

- [5] "Troop Beverly Hills is a deceptively subtle take on glamour." (The AV Club, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/4y2kd99y>

- [6] "Troop Beverly Hills Sequel in the Works From Director Oran Zegman." (Variety, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/kdz6z3j5>

SIZE MATTERS: HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS

Release date: June 23, 1989

Directed by: Joe Johnston

Written by: Stuart Gordon, Brian Yuzna, & Ed Naha
Essay by: Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

- [1] "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (franchise)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/bdh6sf59>

- [2] "Honey, I Shrunk The Kids is just as terrifying 30 years on" (AV Club, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/5ctych62>

- [3] "'Honey, I Shrunk the Kids' Movie Set Adventure" (Yesterland) <https://tinyurl.com/muruz634>

- [4] "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (franchise)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/bdh6sf59>

- [5] Ibid.

That's all, folks!

girlsonfilmzine.com