

ISSUE XXXII

MAY 2026

GIRLS, ON FILM

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PENTENTARY II
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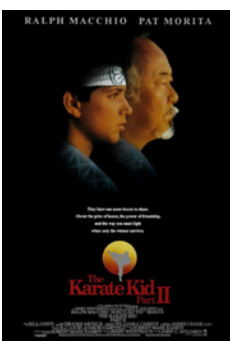
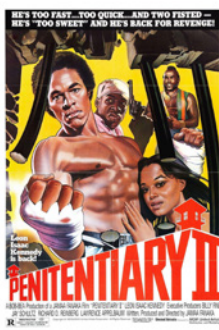
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GIRLS, ON FILM

THE SEQUELS ISSUE

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Fill My Eyes With That Double Vision

Welcome to Issue 32 of *Girls, on Film*, the zine that is hopelessly devoted to 80s movies! Each issue features eight films released between 1980-1989, all related to a particular theme. We explore every corner of the decade's cinema, from beloved blockbusters to obscure gems and everything in between.

Issue 32 is all about sequels to 80s movies:

The Empire Strikes Back (1980) Darth and his crew cause more trouble while Luke is away at Jedi camp.

Penitentiary II (1982) Jamaa Fanaka's prison movie set mostly outside of prison.

Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan (1982) Character, consequence, and the power of a well-timed "KHAAAANN!!!"

Return to Oz (1985) A dark and scary return to Oz based on L. Frank Baum's later books.

The Karate Kid Part II (1986) Just like the first movie except for the characters, setting, story, and that it's a completely new direction for the *Karate Kid* franchise.

Teen Wolf Too (1987) A lazy, terrible rehash of *Teen Wolf* but without Michael J. Fox.

Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master (1988) Body horror without the gore, but not even in my own wildest dreams would I have thought this film would be relevant today.

Back to the Future Part II (1989) Marty McFly ignores the Golden Rule of time travel while he and Doc get a first-hand lesson in alternate timelines in this banger sequel.

About *Girls, on Film*

Girls, on Film is a quarterly fanzine hopelessly devoted to 80s movies. Get digital issues for free or purchase full-color prints. We also invite guest submissions, collaborations, and trades. Learn more on our website girlsonfilmzine.com, reach out by email (info@girlsonfilmzine.com), or follow on Instagram ([@girlson80sfilm](https://www.instagram.com/girlson80sfilm)).

Co-Founders/Editors

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

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

Contributing Writers

Dr. Rhonda Baughman, a teacher and freelance writer, raised adolescent hell in the 80s, and the horror films of that era were her BFFs! She loves all 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 got a pink laminated Video Time Video membership at nine years old and

she never looked back. Or forward, really; she still loves her VHS and VCR. And let it be known, the scrunchie never died for Rhonda: she STILL wears one proudly!

Sebastian Gregory came of age in the fiery crucible of the 1980s. His parents were avid cinephiles who dragged him to every small, independent movie house in Houston and made sure he had a thorough education in film, which may explain his enduring affection for low-grade Italian westerns. He has been an editor, writer, musician, and actor while masquerading as an IT drone in Sector 17.

Matt Scelza 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. He's got too many favorites to name.

Guest Writer

John Kidwell is a writer from St. Louis, Missouri. An 80s baby himself, John has a special place in his heart for the movies of the 1980s, even the really bad ones. He lives in Baltimore with his girlfriend and their two cats.

Write for the Zine

Are you an 80s fan who loves to write about movies? Send a short bio and writing samples to info@girlsonfilmzine.com. Submissions are not paid.



Who's Your Daddy?

The Empire Strikes Back

by Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

Applause, please! We are 32 issues into this zine and finally getting around to talking about a *Star War*, the IP that will inevitably creep into everything and never go away. It took us 40-some years to get even around to watching the original trilogy, only to discover that *Star Wars* (or rather, the Skywalker Saga, since we didn't get any further than that) is quite good, surprisingly wholesome, and not at all the overwrought nerd nonsense we were expecting.

For some time, we actively avoided what has become such a pervasive franchise, a seeming labor of love that has since morphed into a sad hyperfixation on “Merchandising! Merchandising! Merchandising!” especially under The Mouse™ (Mr. Plinkett’s recent autopsy comes to mind [1]). Even so, the early films, hits that they were, never even seemed to accidentally find their way into our collective orbit when we were young, with the exception of the unfortunately named Ewok movie *Caravan of Courage* (1984) (not an equivalent hit, but a *Star War* nonetheless) which our folks taped off of TV

and then didn't label so we would remember we had it, much less watch it. Of course, it was also the 1980s, and there was not yet the corporate frenzy surrounding the brand that would outmatch the numerous other franchises we preferred instead. Give us a *G.I. Joe* or a *He-Man* or a *Teenage Ninja Turtle*.

Naturally, we couldn't miss the loads of *Star Wars* parodies, tributes, and knock-offs, and it's hard not to constantly see those while watching the original trilogy, especially *Spaceballs*. (Well... are you ready for the Hulu documentary that will inevitably be made when we sell the movie rights to all this exciting backstory?!)

George Lucas's wholesome operatic space battle between good and evil started taking shape in the early 1970s, originally culminating in the Skywalker Saga Trilogy: *Star Wars* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983), before being revived for *The Phantom Menace* 16 years later and never stopping (but could it please slow down?)



Don't bench Luke!

The trilogy is more like a three-part miniseries where orphaned farm boy Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) grows up to be Savior of the Galaxy. In the first film, the OG heroes (and banger cast) assemble: Luke; Prince Leia (Carrie Fisher); Han Solo (Harrison Ford); Chewy (Peter Mayhew); R2-D2 (Kenny Baker); C-3PO (Anthony Daniels); and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness) work together to defeat the GD Galactic Empire and destroy the Death Star. Chronic Asthma sufferer Darth Vader (James Earl Jones) vows revenge.

In *Empire*, Yoda trains Luke in the ways of the Jedi and the gang infiltrates the Imperial ship. *Return of the Jedi* concludes the saga, putting Luke's unfinished Jedi training to the test while the gang—you guessed it—infiltrates Imperial forces. We have a hard time reconciling that the Galactic Empire, led by someone as awful as Palpatine, would be defeated in large part by an army of cute little Ewoks in the third movie. Our apologies to the Ewok stans for criticizing them twice now in this short essay, we otherwise have no problem with them.

Empire was our favorite movie in the trilogy, the one that kept us going beyond mere obligation to write an essay. The first *Star War* seemed like something that could have easily been written off as a cheesy sci-fi flick and ultimately went nowhere. There were plenty of those in the 1980s...looking at you in Blast Hard Cheese! George Lucas certainly had a time finding a studio to take on the project, as some doubted his skill and others wondered if they'd make



Limbs are a liability.

the money back on the kind of budget required for the movie he envisioned, or both. Doubt lingered even into production [2]. Audiences clearly found magic in *Star Wars* and stuck with it. It's easy to see what hooked people in the beginning: the action and adventure, the good-natured humor, an elementary tale of good vs. evil engulfed in gorgeous visual and rich characters. The princess wasn't a dumb-dumb with boobies (though there was the unfortunate "harem bikini" in *Return of the Jedi*). The Force didn't come easy to Luke. Even ol' Darth Vader wasn't just a one-note villain.

The juxtaposition between good and evil is especially interesting. The Galactic Empire seems as boring as their monochrome color scheme. The infantry career must be a real snooze-fest, save the few seconds when the heroes come blazing through, assuming said soldier wasn't in the bathroom or dozing off. Even more comical is Darth's rotating roster of expendable middle-men.

Meanwhile, the heroes are filling up their IG stories with all the excitement: getting robbed in the desert, decked by a snow yeti, imprisoned in an alien harem, chilling at a hopping cantina, eating weird shit with Yoda, racing speeders in a Redwood forest, and sharing the screen with Billy Dee William's amazing hair. Considering the parallels to modern life, thank God Luke had the balls to tell Palpatine to fuck off by the end of the third movie (somehow, he comes back).



Like looking out from Greyskull.

It was as if *Empire* turned to the first movie and said, you had your fun, but now we have work to do, especially Luke. (It's very reminiscent of the tonal shift in the first two *Back to the Future* movies, also discussed in this issue). The fate of the Galaxy primarily rests on Luke's shoulders of a young guy who basically thought he'd leave the farm and pilot fighter jets, not be responsible for the fate of humanity. It's one nailbiting challenge after the next: he's knocked out by a snow creature and left for dead. He and R2D2 crash in the swamp where he finds the Great Jedi Master, Yoda. He trains to become a Jedi, but seriously struggles: Yoda doubts he has the discipline to become a great Jedi, and then Luke must choose between rescuing the rest of his crew and completing his training with an 800-year old goblin who might not have much longer to live (spoilers: he doesn't).

Empire also revealed some big news; Darth is Luke's father (it's complicated) and their reunion earns Luke a cyborg arm (actually, it's a bad time for arms in this trilogy). It seems like the most frustrating time in Luke's life, at least until *Return of the Jedi* when he confronts Palpatine, who sees Luke as the Empire's greatest threat and tries to convince him to give in to the Dark Side.

Mark Hamill hosted a corny making-of documentary about *Empire* that reads like something made for school kids. The doc almost exclusively showcases the film's gorgeous analog effects and cinematography, no doubt the highlight of



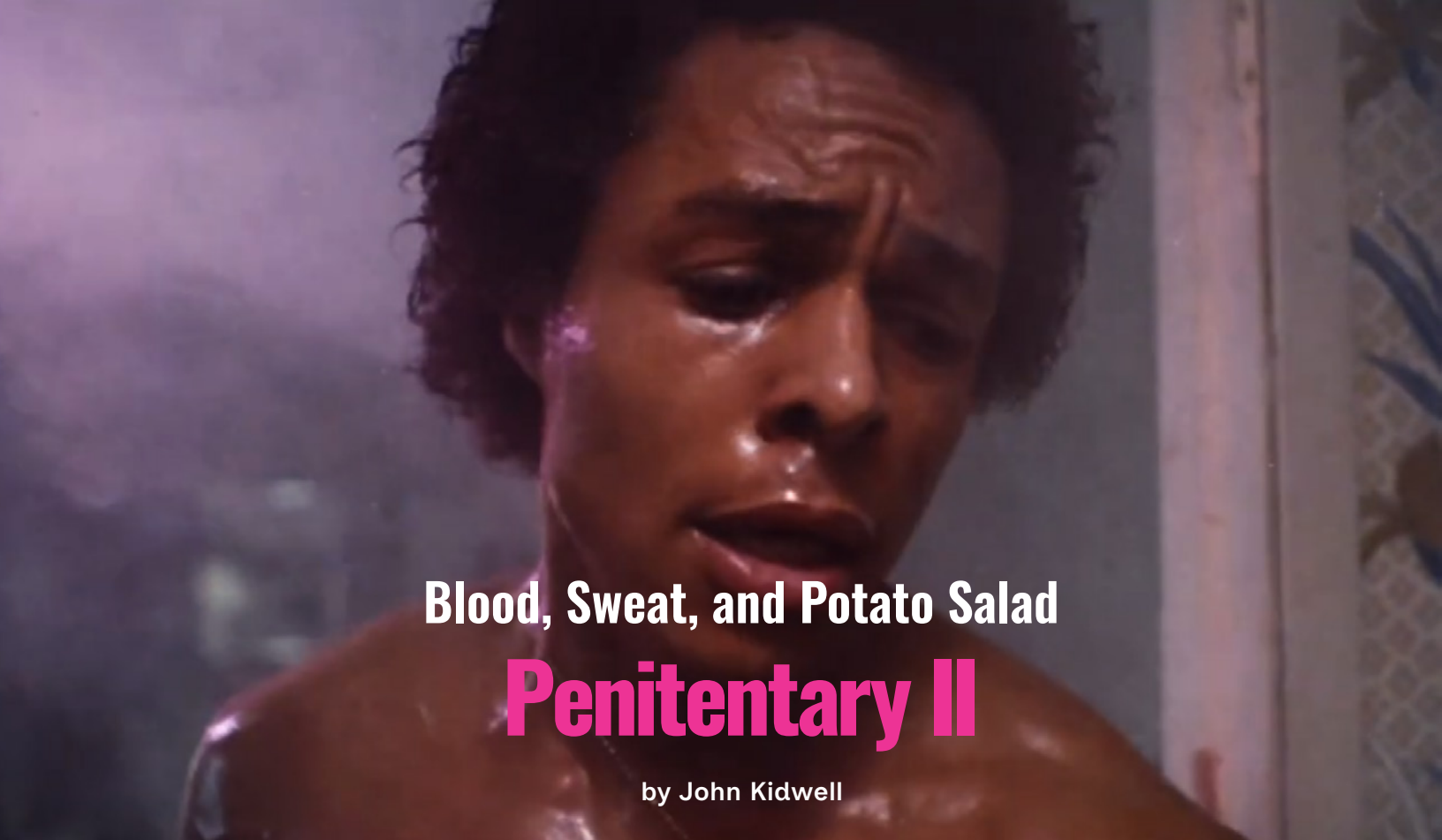
Luke...Leila...we've got some news...

the whole Skywalker trilogy and for films coming up on 50-year anniversaries, still look so good. Of course, some audio and footage has since been remastered for hi-def viewing.

This is what we especially adored about early films like these [3], the ingenuity and trickery involved in say, passing a camera over a miniature in a way that translates so beautifully and seamlessly onscreen as a massive craft passing through an infinite galaxy, or the makeup and puppetry used to create all the different lifeforms the filmmakers dreamed up. Hamill's goofy narration also reminds us that, just like the modern Green Screen actors, the cast of the original trilogy was just as obscured from their surroundings as the effects teams did their work all around them.

Watching the films unfold in so much well-paced excitement, it's not really all that hard to see how the early *Star Wars* fare captured viewers' hearts. Oddly, we were going into this expecting something a lot more complicated than basically the space version of *Karate Kid* (1985), probably because of all the new characters and story lines since. Yet, the early films truly feel like what George Lucas set out to do: a fairly simple, hopeful, wholesome space fantasy, and damn if we can't something hopeful nowadays.

So, from casual first-time viewers to potential other casual first-time viewers, we recommend watching the whole Skywalker trilogy. You can find them all on Disney+ as of this writing.



Blood, Sweat, and Potato Salad

Penitentiary II

by John Kidwell

If the main criterion for a great sequel is superiority to the original, few sequels make the grade. For every *Road Warrior* or *The Dark Knight*, there are dozens of *Speed 2: Cruise Controls*. From a business standpoint, the sequel's purpose is to capitalize on the original's success, squeezing every last drop of juice from popular IPs before either discarding or rebooting them. But even as sequels pose obvious challenges to filmmakers, they also present an opportunity: to reimagine existing material in new, exciting ways.

When evaluating a sequel, maybe is it better than the original? is the wrong question to ask; not only is it unfair to hold sequels to the high standards set by their predecessors, but I can't help but notice that many of my favorite sequels evince no particular desire to follow the original's lead.

Perhaps better questions to ask of a sequel are: does it take the material into new, uncharted territory? Does it switch things up? Does it do things differently? Does it suggest a whole new

way of doing things? If we accept these broader criteria, Jamaa Fanaka's *Penitentiary II* is one of the most fascinating, eccentric, and rewarding sequels ever made. Where *Penitentiary* was a fairly straightforward, serious prison drama peppered with blaxploitation flourishes, its sequel is an unhinged, riotous exercise in 80s excess—a worthy *Rocky III* to the original's *Rocky*, and with a supporting turn from Mr. T.

Penitentiary II begins in a *Star Wars* text scroll, explaining all that's transpired between the two films: Martell "Too Sweet" Gordone (Leon Isaac Kennedy) is granted early parole, the terms of which require him to work for boxing handler Sam Cunningham (Stan Kamber). Too Sweet's parole officer warns him that the villainous "Half Dead" (Ernie Hudson, replacing Badja Djola from the original) has escaped custody and is searching for Too Sweet, who "fought off his nocturnal amorous advances in a prison cell" in the first film.

The first thing audiences may notice about *Penitentiary II* is that, unlike its predecessor, it



Too Sweet: Family Man!

does not take place in prison; instead, Fanaka expands the world of *Penitentiary* into the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. Too Sweet moves in with his sister Ellen (Peggy Blow) and her family, who live in a lavish suburban home with a swimming pool. Refusing to box, he sweeps and mops the floors of Sam's gym, supplementing his meager income by delivering documents on roller skates for his lawyer brother-in-law Charles (Glynn Turman).

Too Sweet's attitude toward boxing inexplicably changes after Half Dead rapes and murders his girlfriend Clarisse (Eugenia Wright). In a tearful monologue, Too Sweet tells Ellen that he's going to become the champion of the world for Clarisse, even though Clarisse expressed no particular desire to see Too Sweet return to boxing. To help him train, Sam introduces Too Sweet to "the very best teacher, Mr. T," whom we first see beating up a sparring partner who pulled a blade on him. Unlike *Rocky III's* Clubber Lane, this fictionalized version of Mr. T frequently wears a genie outfit and rubs a magic lamp before each fight, filling the arena with colorful smoke.

Meanwhile, Half Dead is arrested for Clarisse's rape and murder, though it isn't long before his henchmen Simp (Marvin Jones) and Do Dirty (Cepheus Jaxon) help him escape. On the run once again, Half Dead hides out in a tiny apartment with his girlfriend Sugar (Ebony Wright), who can't understand why her boyfriend is so hellbent on getting revenge against Too Sweet. In one especially memorable scene, after Sugar threatens Half Dead with a razor, he



If there's a steady paycheck in it, he'll kill anything.

overpowers her and smears potato salad over her face, which quickly escalates into a messy make-out session.

Too Sweet's old pal Seldom Seen (Malik Carter) is soon released from prison and joins Mr. T's team of trainers. Originally portrayed by Floyd 'Wildcat' Chatman, the sequel changes the character from wise prison oracle to ex-con trying to get laid. Though other characters refer to him as Seldom Seen, in a subtle nod to his recasting (which both Fanaka and Kennedy reportedly opposed), the film officially credits him as Seldom Seems. When Too Sweet agrees to box the prison's reigning champion Jesse 'The Bull' Amos (Donovan Womack), Seldom Seen is the only person in his corner who challenges his decision, correctly predicting that he's not ready to fight Amos. Though Too Sweet loses the match, he lasts long enough to build a significant fanbase and impress promoters, and after a series of subsequent victories, a rematch against Amos is scheduled, which Too Sweet insists must also be held at the prison.

According to Kennedy, since so much of *Penitentiary II* is set outside of prison, he and Fanaka decided that the fight scenes should take place in prison [1]. Somewhat implausibly, these matches are nationally televised events, which Ellen and Charles watch from their living room with their son. Half Dead sends Simp and Do Dirty to their home to hold them hostage while he visits the fight incognito (in a rainbow-colored afro wig) to bet against Too Sweet. As added insurance, Half Dead breaks one of Too Sweet's hands. Too Sweet struggles to keep up



Dolemite must say goodnight!

with the dextrous Amos with only one hand, but once Ellen and Charles overpower their captors and come to the match, with superior footwork and a renewed desire to win, he turns the tables and beats Amos. Meanwhile, Mr. T finds Half Dead in the locker room and, in a hilariously one-sided fight scene, administers a punishing beatdown.

In any other movie, a fight between Ernie Hudson and Mr. T would be the centerpiece, but because *Penitentiary II* is so consistently weird and outrageous, it barely registers. Janaka infuses the film with many odd flourishes, not least of all a subplot involving Tony Cox as an inmate trying to raise enough money shooting dice to obtain the services of a prostitute (which are eventually rendered under the boxing ring's canvas). Yet much like its predecessor, beneath *Penitentiary II*'s surface pleasures are serious questions about the exploitation of black men within and without the prison industrial complex.

One detail never mentioned in the first *Penitentiary* is that, before going to prison for a murder he didn't commit, Too Sweet fought in Vietnam. Though Too Sweet's veteran status is only referenced in passing and at first may seem insignificant, Fanaka's clear purpose for including this detail is establishing a continuum of racialized exploitation: from the battlefield to the prison yard to the boxing ring, the predominantly white ruling class sees Too Sweet as less a human being than an instrument in their violent capitalist agenda. If Too Sweet profits from his boxing career, he'll never see as



Mr. T pities the fool who violates parole.

much money as his white collar overlords.

Unfortunately, Fanaka endured a similar lack of agency during the distribution of *Penitentiary II*. After the first film's success, United Artists agreed to produce the sequel with a budget roughly triple that of its predecessor. However, when it came time to distribute the film, MGM badly fumbled the ball. The studio planned to release *Rocky III* the same year, but rather than capitalize on Mr. T's appearance in a sure-fire box-office hit to the benefit of the lesser known *Penitentiary II*, MGM released *Penitentiary II* weeks before *Rocky III*. Stallone's movie debuted in 939 theaters, while Fanaka's opened in a paltry 198 [2][3].

Despite a limited theatrical release and almost non-existent advertising, *Penitentiary II* recouped almost double its budget in its opening weekend, proving that there was a significant enough audience to justify another sequel. Cannon Films released *Penitentiary III* in 1987, which to this day languishes in copyright purgatory and remains unseen by many of the franchise's biggest fans. Had they been properly advertised and marketed, the *Penitentiary* movies might've been massive hits, but in their relative obscurity, they have nevertheless enjoyed a second life as bonafide cult classics.

Though *Penitentiary II* may not achieve the dramatic weight of the first *Penitentiary* (both are on Tubi), it's a much weirder, nastier, and more eccentric entry in the series—in other words, a perfect sequel. Make sure to watch it with a big bowl of potato salad.



A Sequel Saves the Franchise

Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn

by Sebastian Gregory

To come to grips with this sequel, it's instructive to have a little background on the odd plight of the first *Star Trek* movie, which was unimaginatively titled *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. In 1979, ten years after the original TV series was off the air, "The Motionless Picture" was unleashed upon the ravenous hordes of Trekkers (Trekkies if you're old school geek). The on-screen action, despite some good special effects, was lacking.

As I recall, people who got high before seeing it seemed to enjoy it more than anyone. Not that it was a bad movie, but outside of the diehard Trekkers it landed with a bit of thud. The reviewers were quick to pigeonhole it as mediocre sci-fi dreck. Roger Ebert said it was "probably about as good as we could have expected" though he did praise the effects and the concept [1]. Financials on the first film were good (gross \$47 million [2]), but the movie failed to connect with a larger audience. Paramount blamed *Star Trek* creator Gene Rodenberry for the cost overruns and delays

due to constant rewrites.

Gene Rodenberry wrote a sequel (a plot about time travel and the JFK assassination...), but Paramount rejected it and removed Rodenberry from production after he refused to give up creative control [3]. Instead, Paramount turned over the reins to Harve Bennett, a new television executive who claimed he could make five movies on the budget of the first film... despite having never seen an episode of the original TV series. While getting acquainted with the series, Bennett latched onto Ricardo Montalbán as the out-of-time villain Khan Noonien Singh from "Space Seed" (22nd episode, 1st season) as a good foil for William Shatner's James T. Kirk [4].

Trekkers appreciated the continuity that tied the movie back to the series and Montalbán proved to be an inspired choice to reprise the role of Khan. He was well known to television audiences as Mr. Roark on *Fantasy Island*. He looked amazing and could deliver lines taken right out of Melville's *Moby Dick* with an



Kirk's mid-life crisis.

intensity that overcame the inherent cheesiness of the dialogue. Considering how much vitriol flows between Khan and Kirk, it's incredible that Montalbán and Shatner never share a moment of face-to-face screen time.

The screenplay (story by Harve Bennett, developed by Jack Sowards and an uncredited Nicholas Meyer, who also directed [5]) was crisply paced, more like an extended television episode, with multiple storylines that neatly converge during the devastating third act. Killing off a beloved character is a risky move, especially for a TV/movie franchise still trying to find its legs. Somehow, they pulled it off, with a delicious twist that set up the next movie *The Search for Spock*.

I can tell you, as someone who grew up watching *Star Trek* reruns, watching Spock's stoic, utterly selfless sacrifice ("...I have been... and always shall be... your friend.") was a total gut punch in the theater. I mean it was one thing to know beforehand it was going to happen (we did, even in the pre-Internet days, manage to scoop some inside info) but quite another to experience it for the first time in the theatre: I wept. Like, hardcore, which is kind of funny, because when I rewatched it for this review, it didn't hit nearly as hard... except it did, when I realized that Ricardo Montalbán, Leonard Nimoy, James Doohan, DeForrest Kelly, and Nichelle Nichols have all passed away.

There is a decidedly more nautical feel to this



Dissection demo with a Kahn man.

iteration, a touch of Horatio Hornblower in outer space. Unaware it also served as inspiration for Rodenberry on the original series [6], Director Nicholas Meyer took inspiration from the Hornblower series as he worked on the final shooting script and subsequent rewrites. A ship's bell was added to the Enterprise and the crew were piped to stations. Admiral Kirk conducts an inspection. Starfleet uniforms are very Navy in sharp contrast to Khan's post-apocalyptic space pirates. The final duel takes place in a nebula between two grand ships of the line. Meyer worked closely with the composer James Horner on a score that evoked nautical and swashbuckling themes [7].

As a kid, I barely noticed any of the military/nautical coding, but I knew I liked this version of the starship Enterprise better than the beige and tan blandness of the first movie. This *Star Trek* had some real space grit, from hints of a gruesome massacre on a space station to mind-controlling ear worms. Then comes the delicious schadenfreude: Kirk discovers he has a son he never knew existed—who can't stand him. It's worth the price of a ticket to watch Shatner/Kirk process that little nugget, not to mention the apocalyptic Genesis Device, which creates life in a void...or is perverted and used as a weapon to destroy an entire planet.

Shatner's Kirk is vulnerable and lost, at least in the first act. He's feeling his age. The younger generation of leaders are ready to go and he's feeling like he's been put out to pasture. This



Life from lifelessness.

starts off a story arc about aging, death, and friendship that pays off by the third act. Kirk is still the charismatic charmer, but he senses there is a price that is about to come due... unless he can cheat it once again. The other surrounding characters (Bones, Spock, Uhura, Chekov, Sulu, even Saavik—a young Kirstie Alley!) are more than able to work the same magic on screen that they had on the TV series. There's chemistry between the characters, hints of shared past experiences, little knowing glances and looks, all done in character. Then there's Kirk just bellowing into the cosmos, delivering overacting at its very best.

Montalbán's Khan is like watching a slowly erupting volcano. He was reportedly happy to take on the character again, even though he had to work around his *Fantasy Island* shooting schedule. At 61 he was in remarkably good shape and needed no prosthetics to fill out his chest baring costume [8].

There's good reason for Khan's singular fixation on Kirk. According to *Star Trek* canon, for four years in the mid-1990s, Khan was the tyrannical ruler of a quarter of the Earth's population. He and his followers escaped on a colony ship and headed into the unknown while in suspended animation for 200 years... until they were discovered and awakened by Captain Kirk in the episode "Space Seed." Kirk defeated Khan and stranded him on Ceti Alpha 5. Khan hasn't exactly forgotten. All of this gets retconned in some of the later films, but that's technically a



Don't grieve; it's doctor's orders!

different reality. *Star Trek* continuity gets very confusing much past the first five films.

I've got to mention the special effects. They were quite good compared with other big tent pole sci-fi films of that time. Industrial Light & Magic handled most of the ship building and battle sequences. To get the star fields right for each scene, the producers actually used a planetarium to map where the ships would be in the galaxy. One shot is particularly fascinating: the computer simulation of the Genesis Device in action. Not only was it the first entirely computer-generated sequence ever used in cinema, the studio within Industrial Light & Magic that produced the sequence went on to become Pixar [9].

It's always tough for a sequel to live up to the original or even surpass it, especially when the audience feels very protective about the first film. *The Wrath of Khan* had a lot stacked against it: a new producer who replaced the series creator, a budget conscious studio breathing down the director's neck, and a script that was undergoing rewrites up until the first day of shooting.

Thanks to inspired design, tight production, and a terrific cast, they pulled off a solid film that resonated with both Trek loyalists and critics. It didn't hurt that it made close to \$80 million on a budget just under \$12 million [10]. Franchise saving? I don't think that's an over-exaggeration. Live long, and prosper, indeed.



Can We Go Back to Kansas?

Return to OZ

by Stephanie McDevitt

Return to Oz is Disney's unofficial sequel to MGM's *The Wizard of Oz*. The original movie is based on the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) by L. Frank Baum. This movie draws from Baum's later books in the Oz series, *The Land of Oz* (1904) and *Ozma of Oz* (1907). And I am here to tell you that this movie is nothing like the original. Like not even a little bit. It's not a musical, the design closely follows the illustrations from the book, which are scary, and it's really dark. The first movie is, too, but this movie approaches terrifying. To paraphrase Judy Garland's Dorothy Gale, "We're not in Kansas anymore." In fact, the BBC says *Return to Oz* has a reputation for being one of the scariest kid's movies of the 80s [1] (and it came out the same year as one of the other scariest kids movies of the 80s, *The Peanut Butter Solution* [2], featured in *Girls, on Film Issue #4*).

So, why would Disney even bother to make a sequel to one of the greatest movies ever made? Well, they bought the rights to Baum's remaining Oz books in 1954. The original plan

was to use the books in the TV series Walt Disney's *Disneyland*. This series was supposed to lead to a movie called *The Rainbow Road to Oz*, but that movie never came to fruition. In 1980, writer and director Walter Murch suggested another Oz movie. Disney approved the project because the rights to the book were about to expire and the stories would have become public domain [3]. So, Murch set out to continue the original story by making a sequel that is so different from the original, I didn't even know it existed until a few weeks prior to this writing.

Return to Oz begins six months after the end of *The Wizard of Oz*. Aunt Em (Piper Laurie) and Uncle Henry (Matt Clark) are still trying to rebuild after the tornado, and Dorothy (Fairuza Balk) is having trouble sleeping (one quick note: Dorothy is much younger in this movie. Balk was only 10-years old at the time of filming). Aunt Em is worried about Dorothy because she cannot stop talking about Oz, and they are starting to think Dorothy is delusional. So Aunt Em sets up

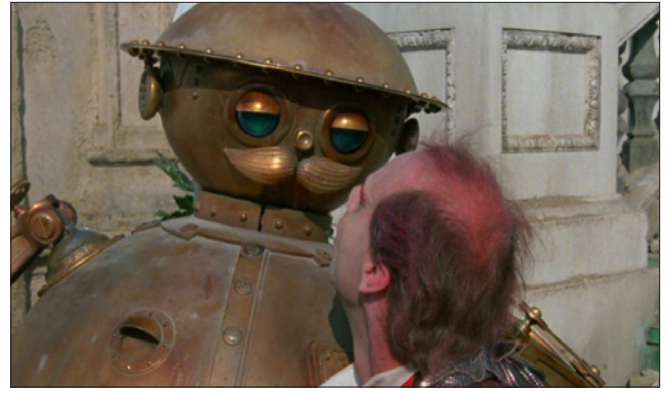


Goodbye, Yellow Brick Road.

an appointment for Dorothy to see a doctor who will help her sleep. What really happens is that Aunt Em takes Dorothy to see Dr. Worley (Nicol Williamson) and Nurse Wilson (Jean Marsh), who plan to perform electroshock therapy, which Dr. Worley says is the way of the future! (I understand that electroconvulsive therapy is still used today to treat a variety of conditions, but it's not the same as the inhumane procedures used in the 1800s.)

Nurse Wilson and Dr. Worley strap Dorothy to a gurney and lead her through a terrifying 19th century sanitarium to fry her brains. Dorothy knows something is not quite right (maybe it's all the screaming patients), but to her credit she remains very calm. Right as they're about to turn on the machine, a storm knocks out the electricity. They leave Dorothy to try to get the power back on, and she is rescued by a young girl in a white night gown (Emma Ridley). The girl tells her to get the hell out of there, so they flee into the torrential rainstorm and they are washed away in a river.

Dorothy manages to float downstream in an old chicken coop and she wakes up in Oz, but it's not the same Oz she left six months ago. The Yellow Brick Road is destroyed, Emerald City has no more emeralds, and all the people have been turned to stone, including the Tin Man and Lion. Dorothy eventually meets Tik-Tok, a stout mechanical man who tells her that the Scarecrow told him to await her return, but the Scarecrow is nowhere to be found. So Tik-Tok and Dorothy (and her talking Chicken, Bellina)



Tik-Tok is no Tin Man.

head out to find the Scarecrow. They first visit the castle of Princess Mombi (also played by Jean Marsh), who tells Dorothy that the Nome King (also played by Nicol Williamson) is responsible for the destruction of Oz, and he is holding the Scarecrow hostage. Princess Mombi is a terrifying creature herself. She is headless, and she has a set of human heads in her possession that she wears depending on her mood. She decides Dorothy's head would be nice to add to her collection, so she captures Dorothy, Tik-Tok, and Bellina and locks them in her tower.

While in the tower, they encounter Jack Pumpkin Head (he looks like a skinny guy with a pumpkin head), who explains that Mombi has a power to bring things to life. So, Dorothy creates a flying device out of a stuffed Moose head (called The Gump), a couch, a broom, and some palm leaves. She steals Mombi's power and brings The Gump to life. Dorothy, her talking chicken, her robot man, and a dude with a pumpkin head all climb aboard and fly out of the tower towards the Nome King's mountain to rescue the Scarecrow.

Are you following me? I'm not sure I'm following me, but let's talk about the first half hour of this movie. How can you take a beloved, classic movie, one that is also full of whimsy and rainbows, and start the sequel with a 10-year-old girl getting electroshock therapy? I have never read the books, but I did find one source who said that Dorothy was never subjected to this kind of torture in the original story [4],



That's some fine claymation!

so why do it now? It was terrifying (and I have toured a few different 18th century hospitals and prisons, and I thought the set was very convincing).

Whether Oz is a dream or hallucination or even an alternate universe for Dorothy, she obviously knew on some level what they were trying to do to her in the hospital. When Dorothy squares off with Princess Mombi, she needs to escape so Mombi won't cut off her head. Then, once Dorothy and crew reach the Nome King's mountain, he tells them that the people from Oz were turned into ornaments. Dorothy and her posse are each given three chances to guess which one is the Scarecrow, but if they don't figure it out, they will also be turned into ornaments. So, Dorothy has to outsmart both Mombi and the Nome King, kind of like she did when she was in the hospital, and avoid becoming an inanimate object.

When I wasn't cringing at the terror-filled existence of this young child, I kept thinking that this movie looked a lot like the Jim Henson movie *Labyrinth*, which came out the year after *Return to Oz*. It turns out that the creature design supervisor, Lyle Conway, worked in the Jim Henson creature shop, and Brian Henson (Jim Henson's son) performed Jack Pumpkinhead's puppetry [5]. There are scenes in the Nome King's mountain that are done in claymation and were created by Will Vinton, who also did the claymation for *The Adventures of Mark Twain* [6], featured in *GOF* Issue #8. The



The Girl with the Green Ribbon

Nome King starts the scenes with Dorothy as a talking rock, but every time one of Dorothy's friends turns into an ornament, he becomes more human. The claymation transformation of the Nome King was pretty cool to watch despite the creepy implication.

The coolest creature in this movie is Tik-Tok. He's a little mechanical guy, and Dorothy has to frequently wind him up or he loses power. Tik-Tok's head was controlled remotely, but there was an actor inside the suit to move his arms. Tik-Tok was not even as tall as Fairuza Balk, so the two actors who performed in the suit, Michael Sundin and Peter Elliot, were both contortionists and they had to do their scenes bent over with their heads between their legs while looking at a small monitor to see where they were going. I feel like there might have been a better way to control Tik-Tok, but as all the shitty AI art rolls out, it was really nice to see very creative and inventive artistry throughout.

The puppetry and claymation earned the movie an Oscar nom for Best Visual Effects (lost to *Cocoon*). While *Return to Oz* got props for the effects, reviews were mixed. Disney spent about \$6 million to promote the movie, but it didn't help, only making \$11 million on a \$28 million budget [7]. Apparently, *Oz* has gained a cult following from fans of the books since it's more faithful to Baum's stories than the original movie. This one is not for me, but if you want to check it out, it's on Disney+ as of this writing.



We're not in Reseda Anymore

The Karate Kid Part II

by Stephanie McDevitt

The first *Karate Kid* spawned several movies, TV shows, and video games (you can read more in my essay in Issue 26). But before it became a franchise, the second installment asked, what if we went in a completely different direction?

The Karate Kid Part II came out two years after the first one with the same writer and director, and instead of more adventures with Daniel and Cobra Kai, this movie centers on Mr. Miyagi and his history in Japan. It's definitely a sharp turn from the original, and while I can look at the entire series of movies and TV shows now and see how it all fits together, I'm not sure the writers knew back then how it would all work out.

Part II starts immediately after the end of the first movie. Daniel (Ralph Macchio) and Mr. Miyagi (Pat Morita) are leaving the All Valley tournament when they see John Kreese (Martin Kove), the Cobra Kai sensei, arguing with Johnny (William Zabka) and calling him a loser. When things get physical, Mr. Miyagi steps in to save Johnny and embarrass Kreese. This scene sure seems like a great set up for the rest of

the movie, but, for this sequel, it has nothing to do with anything (*Wiki* says this scene was supposed to be the end of the first movie, but it wasn't shot until after *Part II* was underway [1]).

The next scene jumps forward 6 months. Daniel shows up at Mr. Miyagi's the morning after prom (still wearing a delightful blue tuxedo) and tells Mr. Miyagi that his life is falling apart. His mom took a job in Fresno for the summer, so he's going to have to go with her for three months, and his girlfriend Ali crashed his car right before dumping him for a college guy. Mr. Miyagi is about to come to Daniel's rescue and say he can live with him for the summer when he gets a letter telling him that his father back in Okinawa is dying.

So, Miyagi has to go home to Japan, but things there are very complicated. He tells Daniel that many years ago he fell in love with a woman named Yuki (Nobu McCarthy). However, Yuki was supposed to marry Sato (Danny Kamekona), who was Miyagi's best friend and



The height different is remarkable!

karate student of Miyagi's father. When Sato found out that Miyagi wanted to marry Yuki, he challenged him to a fight to the death. However, as we know from the first movie, Miyagi will only fight to defend himself, so he left Japan for the US and never looked back.

Daniel, who is still trying to avoid going to Fresno, spends his college savings to fly to Japan with Miyagi, and upon their arrival they're greeted by Chozen (Yujiro Okumoto), who says he's there to drive them to Miyagi's village. However, Chozen is Sato's nephew, and he drives him right to meet Sato, who once again says that Miyagi must fight him. Once Daniel and Miyagi get to the village, Yuki and her niece Kumiko (Tamlyn Tomita) explain that Sato is a super rich guy now and his commercial fishing boats have ruined the fish population and impoverished the villagers. He also owns the land and makes the villagers pay him rent. What an asshole.

Eventually, Miyagi's father dies and Sato gives him three days to mourn before he must fight. If Miyagi refuses to fight, Sato says he will destroy the village. On the day of the fight, a typhoon hits, and all the villagers run into an old World War II bunker. Sato gets trapped in a collapsed building, and Miyagi runs out to save his life. Once Sato is free, Miyagi and Daniel realize a young girl is also trapped in the storm, and Daniel goes to save her. Sato tells Chozen he should help Daniel, but Chozen is too scared. Sato publicly shames Chozen and disowns him,



Miyagi sees his dad one last time.

which makes Chozen real angry. The next day, Sato apologizes to Miyagi for being just the worst for like 40 years, and he offers to hold a celebration, inviting Daniel to join. But, it wouldn't be a karate movie without a fight, and Chozen is really pissed at Daniel for showing him up, so you know a final battle is coming.

What a weird sequel. Writer Robert Mark Kamen and Director John Avildsen had a great concept with the first movie, but they decided for *Part II* to completely shift to a Miyagi backstory. As Vincent Canby said in his *New York Times* review, "Because there apparently are no new worlds for Daniel and Mr. Miyagi to conquer in southern California, Mr. Avildsen and Mr. Kamen have concocted a new script that takes place mostly in Okinawa (actually shot in Hawaii), thus providing some exotic scenery, characters, and weather...to take the place of the learning process that was the first film's chief charm" [2].

I kind of get the motivation to show more of Miyagi's life because in the first movie, Miyagi is the most interesting character. He's a little mysterious and kind of weird, but he's caring and he teaches Daniel many life lessons in addition to some ass-kicking Karate. And we do get some back story on Miyagi in the first movie. We know he came to America before WWII, spent time in an American internment camp, joined the military, received a Medal of Valor for fighting in Germany, and lost his wife and child during childbirth. Miyagi gets very drunk one night and tells Daniel that his wife died and



Mr. Miyagi gets to relive his youth.

it's all very sad. But after that emotional scene, this movie decides to introduce another love in Miyagi's life? OK, he could have had two very intense love stories. But the backstory we got in the first movie was enough, and it was also parallel to the life experience of Pat Morita, so why meddle with it?

In the end, we don't learn that much about Miyagi's life. His father is semi-comatose, aside from one scene where he tries to get Miyagi and Sato to drop the feud. He tells Daniel about people he knew from childhood, but they don't tell us anything new about Miyagi, and even when he's with Yuki, we don't get any new information. Instead, the scenes are filled with Daniel finding new ways to piss off Chozen and attempting to woo Kumiko. What I'm saying is, what is the point of all this?

This movie is definitely missing something that the original captured so well: there were stakes [3]! Daniel needed to learn to fight the "right way" or Johnny was going to destroy him. We all know Miyagi is the superior person and the better fighter than pretty much anyone else. So, having some tough guy continually challenge him to a fight that was never going to happen seems like wasted time. And since Daniel's conflict with Chozen is not the main storyline, nor is it as fun to watch as his conflict with Johnny, it just feels tired by the end of the movie, which was almost two hours long.

One thing I did like about *The Karate Kid*



This scene ends up in the *Karate Kid* NES game.

Part II is the tie-in of WWII, which was also in the first movie. When Miyagi and Daniel get to the village, they see an American military installation sitting right next to all the houses, and throughout the movie, there are military helicopters flying overhead. In fact, they ended up filming this movie in Hawaii because modern-day Okinawa was too impacted by American military bases [4]. That's a nice reference to real-life Japan. The production company also created replicas of Okinawan houses and cast fifty Okinawa-born Hawaii residents as extras to make it authentic [5].

So, *The Karate Kid* sequel isn't the worst movie, but I do think there's some missed opportunities here. Reviews were mixed, but it made a lot of money. The performances were good despite the script, and Pat Morita was once again praised for his portrayal of Mr. Miyagi [6]. And, it features "The Glory of Love" by Peter Cetera, which was nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Song (lost to "Take My Breath Away" from *Top Gun*) [7], so that's pretty cool, although I prefer New Found Glory's pop punk cover over the original.

It would be helpful to watch this movie if you're interested in Netflix's *Cobra Kai* TV series (2018-2025) because they do reference many of its plot points. But don't expect the excitement of the first movie, which totally crane kicks the crap out of *Part II*.



Worse Than Ever Teen Wolf Too

by Stephanie McDevitt

I debated for a long time about whether I wanted to watch and write about *Teen Wolf Too*. I hated the first movie (you can read my essay on that movie in Issue 27 [1]), and I am unhappy to report that the second one was way worse. I knew it was going to be bad before I watched it but good lord. I had to watch it in shifts just to get through it. I don't understand why anyone agreed to make this movie.

The first *Teen Wolf* had a budget of \$4 million and went on to make about \$80 million [2], but that movie had Michael J. Fox. The first movie came out about a month after *Back to the Future*, and I am pretty sure *Teen Wolf* only made money because Fox was extremely popular at the time. But he didn't return for the second one (apparently he didn't like putting on the wolf makeup [3]), so the second movie had no star power or charm or anything likeable. Even the wolf makeup was terrible; they didn't blend it with Jason Bateman's face! It was clearly

just a money grab by the production company Atlantic, but this time it didn't pan out.

Teen Wolf Too is basically a rehash of the first one, with some minor changes. Instead of Fox as Scott Howard, Jason Bateman stars as Scott's cousin Todd Howard. Scott was in high school as he navigated his werewolfism; Todd is headed off to college where he wants to "take science classes" so he can become a veterinarian. Scott's dad, Harold Howard (played again by James Hampton), drops Todd off at school and attempts to tell him that that he might be a werewolf. However, Todd insists he doesn't have the family gene because his parents aren't werewolves (and where are his parents, by the way?). Well, we're about three minutes into the movie and I think we all know what's going to happen.

Todd moves into his room, and his new roommate is Scott's friend Stiles (the same character recast with Stuart Fratkin). He has



Todd is embarrassed by his heritage.

the original *Teen Wolf* merch he got in high school, and he tells Todd he scheduled all his classes for him. Todd is upset when he sees his schedule includes “girls’ volleyball,” because now he has to change his schedule to get all his science classes. When he goes to change his classes, the lady at the desk is super mean, and as Todd gets stressed (which we know from the first movie is a big werewolf trigger), his eyes turn red and he growls a bit.

Todd’s next stop on campus is to go see “a coach” because he’s been given a full athletic scholarship that he knows nothing about. The coach who gave him the scholarship turns out to be Scott’s old basketball coach, Bobby Finstock (the same character recast with Paul Sand), except in this movie, Finstock coaches the boxing team. That makes sense. He gave Todd the boxing scholarship because he assumed Todd would be a werewolf who would beat everyone in boxing. Well, Todd has never participated in any sport and knows nothing about boxing. To make matters worse, Dean Dunn (John Astin) is counting on the boxing team to be good this year so he can get more donor money, so he threatens to revoke Todd’s scholarship if he doesn’t win.

During a lunch with school alumni, Dean Dunn makes Todd dance with Lisa (Beth Ann Miller), who is supposed to be like the bad girl vixen, I guess. Anyway, Todd gets stressed and, for the first time, goes full



John Astin is still kicking it (as of this writing).

werewolf. Everyone is mean at first. They call him a dog and then put fleas on his pants. But then, when he gets into the boxing ring, he turns into a wolf again and he wins his fight. After the fight, it cuts to a big campus party where Todd as the wolf does a whole performance to The Contours Song “Do You Love Me.” There’s a long dance sequence followed by an extended montage of Todd getting ladies, good grades, and even a fancy car from the dean. Todd’s ego soars, just like Scott’s did, and finally the montage ends and Todd realizes he’s being an asshole. So, the last act of the movie shows Todd apologizing to his girlfriend for being terrible and having threesomes with other women (something he actually did), cramming to study for his biology final, and learning how to box as himself and not as the wolf.

This movie is so bad and lazy. One main issue is that Jason Bateman is not nearly as charming as Michael J. Fox. At this point in his career, Bateman had mostly done TV, including episodes of *Little House on the Prairie* and *Silver Spoons*. This movie was his feature film debut, and his father, Kent Bateman, produced it, so I imagine that had something to do with how he ended up in this role. Bateman is unlikeable throughout this movie. He’s a jerk to his friend and eventual girlfriend Emily (Rachel Sharp) both before and after becoming a werewolf. He tries to play charming, but comes off as smarmy and not at all endearing.



Look closely at the bad makeup.

In fairness, the script didn't do him any favors. Are Todd and Scott the same age? They must be if Todd's in college with Scott's high school friends. So, where is Scott then? And why is Scott's dad in charge of all the college transportation? And why would Todd accept an athletic scholarship when he doesn't even play a sport? In the original movie, Scott already played basketball, and being a wolf made him a better player. Todd has never boxed, and he didn't even know why he got a scholarship. The coach made a huge assumption, giving him a full ride without even meeting him first.

Also, boxing is not a team sport. When Scott played basketball you could see him not passing the ball and showing up his teammates, which was a good way to show his changing personality over time. With boxing, he can't really piss off his teammates in the same way because they are not in the ring with him. Todd won one match and instantly started doing musical numbers and running the school. There was no build up like the first movie. Also, why would the NCAA allow a wolf to box with humans?!?!

The only thing about this movie I liked was the return of Scott's friend, Chubby (Mark Holten, *a.k.a.* Francis from *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*). Chubby was on the basketball team with Scott and now he's on the boxing team with Todd, and both times he got upstaged by a wolf. What are the chances of




These guys are sick of Todd's shit!

that happening twice?!

Finally, the plot line with Todd's academic advisor and biology teacher, Tanya Brooks (Kim Darby), was weird. She is also a wolf. She tries to help him throughout the movie by letting him in her class after registration closed, telling him that his antics were hurting him, and even letting him make up the final after he blew it off. In my essay for the first movie, I discussed a theory posited by film critic Outlaw Vern that coming out as a werewolf was a metaphor for coming out as gay [4]. Vern argues that the teacher carries that metaphor over to the sequel because she tries to tell Todd that she knows what he's going through, and she has a short haircut, which could indicate that she's a lesbian [5]. But she never reveals her werewolfism to Todd; we only find out at the very end when she threatens the dean. I don't know about this theory. Like I said with the first movie, I think the writers were only trying to make a quick buck.

And they couldn't even do that. The movie only made about \$3 million [6]. Everyone hated it. It has an 8% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, and Siskel and Ebert gave it two thumbs down [7]. I've made it clear that I also hated this movie. I don't recommend wasting your time with it. However, you can watch it on Tubi for free. The only problem is that there are ads, which will unfortunately only extend your viewing experience.



Mind Over Matter

A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master

by Dr. Rhonda Baughman

High atop classic horror franchise hill where I graze, readers will also find me standing firm in my obstinate subjectivity that *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988) contains not only the most dynamic and robust opening of the series, but it also remains the most intelligent of the bunch. *Elm Streets 1-3* also have magnificent and visually captivating openings, but as far as the double punch combo of opening quote and opening song that sets the mood and creates a visceral reaction in this viewer—the fourth movie is totally it.

Part 3's Edgar Allen Poe quote is pithy and Dokken's "Dream Warriors" song 'fun' once, but ultimately, it's obnoxious. *Part 4's* opening song "Nightmare" can be played even outside the film, as evidenced by my recent vinyl purchase of Tuesday Knight singing "Nightmare" —my 'been waiting for this for 30 years' record.

Bringing in Tuesday Knight to take over *Part 3* OG Dream Warrior survivor Patricia Arquette's Kristen role was always a good choice, I thought, as was bringing back two more legacy

characters, her pals Joey (Rodney Eastman) and Kincaid (Ken Sagoes). To this day, multiple theories abound with Arquette only noting she loved her time on *Elm Street*, but she wanted more serious roles. And although some interview segments, archival videos, and documentaries will hint at some BTS shenanigans and strife, watching a number of cast/crew legends roll by in the opening remains part of my viewing ritual.

Ultimately, the combination of real, practical FX alongside deliberate choices in lighting and settings; strong writing nestled inside moody pop, rap, and advanced literary allusions; and truly, the reminder that child predator Fred rueger only became a dream demon because vigilante parents burned him alive all contribute to *Elm Street 4's* standing as the strongest of the sequels, including the reboot and the *Freddy vs Jason* entry.

Part 4's opening quote from Job 4:13-14 is fierce: "When deep sleep falleth upon men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all



Zillow Gone Wild

my bones to shake.” True to form, the opening song begins and Kristen is seen approaching a creepy child and her creepy chalk drawing before hard rain sends Kristen toward her forever nightmare house: 1428 Elm Street, dilapidated and as uninviting as in *Part 3*, but once inside visual effects take hold and we’re off and running through her dream hellscape.

Kristen, scared to be on her own, uses her special dream power (bringing others into her dream) to call in Joey and Kincaid who are pissed, with Joey even intimating (and foreshadowing) that Kristen needs to stop with her bullshit because if she keeps using her Dream Warrior power she just might “stir him [Freddy] up again.”

Kincaid’s dog Jason (Jake) [1] is also pulled into the dream, emerging from the boiler (also apparently sick of Kristen) to bite her on the arm and this is what wakes them all up, in their individual homes. The boys will corner her the next day at her locker to mention again to shut down her Freddy dream noise, and they’re interrupted only by her dashing beau, Rick (Andras Jones) [2], who is a good guy who learns the stories his girlfriend has tried to tell him are true, but not before he also foreshadows and tells her, “Hey, lighten up. No one’s died.”

Ahh, but that night, Joey and Kincaid are killed in non-gory, inventive ways, by Freddy, resurrected (also inventively) by Kincaid’s dog, Jason (Jake) [3]. Before more deaths of



Kristen commits a major *faux pas*.

Kristen’s circle of friends can start though, she will have to pull them in—and she does. She pulls Alice (Lisa Wilcox), Rick’s sister, into the dream and immediately feels badly, slaps her bud, and then hugs her, before trying to fight Freddy. She fails and Krueger chucks her into a boiling furnace, but not before she transfers her power to Alice [4].

With Kristen’s death, all three original *Elm Street Dream Warrior* kids are gone, but “fresh meat” is on the table for Freddy since Alice can now pull her brother Rick and other friends (Debbie (Brooke Theiss), Sheila (Toy Newkirk), and Dan [5] (Danny Hassel)) into dreams for Freddy to gank their souls. And he does, before Alice kicks his burnt arse in a final showdown.

All special effect scenes from beginning to end are iconic. Top notch, high-level special FX from three baddies (Screaming Mad George, Kevin Yahger [6], and Steven Johnson) also helped propel this film into the forever memorable stratosphere—no CGI, just the hard work of puppetry and prosthetics and optical and model effects shows what moving away from the gritty and into the surreal can really do—there are no false steps.

Moreover, the set design and lighting elements are spot on, bringing in not only neon colors, intense oranges for flames/fire, smoke/fog machines to help with the heavy lifting when some funding was lost, but personally, I enjoyed seeing the deep reds and greens reflective of Freddy’s sweater in several scenes. Mirrors,



One of many excellent set pieces.

water, and stained glass are also used as is an MC Escher-style floor—all to great result and hinting at portals to worlds beyond our own.

Internet critics love to point out plot holes, but I found most of their arguments easily overridden. The writing for *Elm Street 4* is strong, layered, and way better than I remember from my youth, probably because I am old enough to understand a lot more of it now. Rick is shown holding a Soviet Psychology book and then later heard discussing Kafka (foreshadowing for Debbie's death), and eventually, students are shown in a lecture about Aristotle.

All of this is way more advanced than I could have hoped for in my own high school classroom. Additionally, moody pop from Dramarama and the Divinyls, as well as MTV rotation heavy rap from the Fat Boys and DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince (and my first instance of hearing Sinead O'Connor alongside McLyte!) really set the soundtrack bar for all of the *Elm Street* films and none could touch it before or since.

Finally, Freddy's lore stems from his time as a real man, the Springwood [7] slasher—a child molester and murdered who escaped conviction on a technicality, but no matter because angry parents will immolate. In the third *Elm Street*, he is known as the “bastard son of a hundred maniacs” where we find out his mum is nun Amanda Krueger—accidentally locked into a ward full of unstable patients and raped



Go! Go! Gadget: Collective Friends' Skills!

repeatedly over a holiday weekend.

Nightmare on Elm Street Part 4 moves beyond just the idea of bringing Freddy from a dream and into the real world to kill him, and insinuates Alice, the newly appointed Dream Master (well, because she knew the nursery rhyme and absorbed all the powers and traits of her dead friends) must final fight Freddy on his turf if she is to free the souls of all Freddy's victims. Which she does, because as the previously aforementioned Aristotle allusion comes around again to tell us, “He who has overcome his fears will truly be free.”

Growing up, *The Dream Master* was my first *Elm Street* theater watch. The audible and visual discomfort of the audience at the Alice and Danny ‘running in circles’ dream sequence when they fail to save Debbie remains a cherished memory.

The hype was real: heavy TV presence of behind-the-scenes shorts, Alice Cooper's music video, and magical trailers really helped pique interest for young me; additionally, Freddy Fan Club membership and popular magazine mentions would also lead me down the Dream Master obsession path that remains to this day. I really believe audiences still want this level of fun—the nuance, the magical, the real FX horror, but of course, they will have to demand it.



Lightning Strikes a Few More Times

Back to the Future Part II

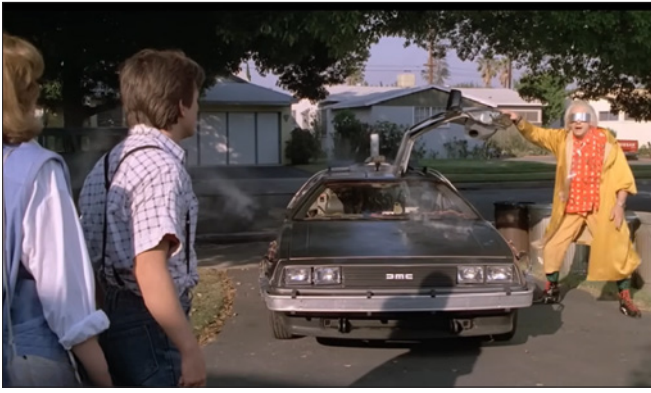
by Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

Since we last sung the praises of the first *Back to the Future* movie in Issue 21, Mr. Marty McFly himself published *Future Boy*, an easily digestible memoir about that time Michael J. Fox had to work two jobs. (We snark, but it truly is funny when a celebrity must stoop to the level of us plebs). It is a interesting glimpse into the fortuitous recasting that saved *Back to the Future*. For the uninitiated (still?!), the 1985 time travel flick by adventure movie greats, The Bobs (Gale and Zemeckis), follows teenager Marty (Fox) as he is transported into the past when the big unveiling of his “wild-eyed scientist friend” (Christopher Lloyd and his stellar eyebrow acting) Doc’s DeLorean time machine goes wrong.

In 1955 Hill Valley, Marty inadvertently bumps into his parents (Lea Thompson as Lorraine; Crispin Glover as George) who are themselves just teenagers. 1955 Doc warns Marty that interacting too much with the past could alter the future, potentially erasing Marty from existence! Marty must play matchmaker with

his parents to ensure they still fall in love at the school dance, which is no easy feat because his mom has the hots for him (imagine if he looked more like his mom!), his dad is a wimp, and they’re all constantly hounded by sad bully Biff (Thomas F. Wilson) and his goons who could all use a Boys & Girls Club. Plus, there’s the teeny hiccup of trying to power a 1980s DeLorean on 1950s tech. With past Doc’s help, Marty not only succeeds, and maybe the exception of disputed writing credits on a future Chuck Berry hit, life improves for the McFly clan long enough so that even he can reap the benefits back in good ol’ 1985. (Sidenote: we expected Marty to be a Camero and not lifted truck kind of dude). Such a finale was also a sticking point for Glover, who chose not to return in *Part II*, though interestingly, adult Marty seems to long for better than “average white-collar suburbanite” in the sequel.

Part I concludes with Doc abruptly crashing a romantic moment between Marty and his girlfriend, Jennifer (Claudia Wells in the first



Doc sports his Future's So Bright™ Shades for the mission.

movie; Elisabeth Shue here) to warn them that something must be done about their kids. Kid, actually. Indeed, the lovebirds eventually tie the knot (shoutout to Chapel O' Love alum) and have two kids, a daughter and son (both played by Fox) but it's really Marty, Jr. who needs the intervention. It's the more sophisticated version of the "see you in the next movie" trope for introducing sequels.

Back to the Future was one of those productions that was fraught from the start, but with the right tweaks went on to become a supermegahit and a pop culture phenomenon. And you know what that means? Sequel time! You get a sequel! And you get a sequel! And you get another sequel! No you don't, there were only three movies, and the Bobs seem intent on keeping it that way [1]. (The third movie, while fun, is not like *Mary Poppins* (perfect in every way), by virtue of being a hokey Western).

In fact, the Bobs weren't really interested in sequels at all. They...gasp!...wanted to leave the ending of the first film to the imagination of the viewers. Universal was like, get in losers, we're going to make sequels (they filmed them simultaneously), and the Bobs basically acquiesced to maintain control over their babies. Who can blame them? That kind of care is why *Back to the Future II: Electric Revenue* such a rare phenomenal follow-up, particularly the technical work.

The second film is a lot darker than the first,



The Tannen lineage really sucks.

making the third some serious tonal whiplash. But, what else can you expect from something where a main character is inspired by POS DJT? (And now, that art imitates life even more bigly. JFC...) The Bobs play on the common pitfalls for sequels to successful freshman efforts, which at the one extreme means doing something completely out of left field (*Gremlins 2*), or worse, making the same movie as before (*Home Alone 2*). *Back to the Future Part II* does both, adding new (and interesting!) elements to the story while also recreating scenes from the previous film, now from new perspectives, as we travel with the gang into future, present, and past Hill Valley. Keeping up with the continuity alone must have been a nightmare (the Bobs & co. weren't about to half ass anything), and it leaves a lot of fun Easter Eggs across the two sequels.

First, we get a fun, fresh vision of the future. Paying homage to the first film, Marty wanders 2015 Hill Valley in awe. There are power laces and flying cars and nostalgia peddlers and baby Elijah Wood. 1985 Marty, the spitting image of his teenage son (Fox plays both), stands in for the boy in order to call off a deal with Biff's asshole grandson Griff (Wilson), culminating in a fantastic hoverboard chase through the town square that mirrors the skateboard to doo-doo-dump chase in *Part I*. (It's actually one of two great hoverboard chases in the movie).

Then things get serious, just a little at first as we see future Marty, now a white collar



Biff warned Biff about this!

stiff, mourning his flailing rock star dreams. (Sidenote: was the McFly house inspired by the final set of the *Carousel of Progress*?). 1985 Marty initiates the terrible shit to follow when he instantly dismisses the lessons of the first movie and buys a Sports Almanac to do a little sports betting in the past. Doc rightfully tosses it. Meanwhile, Biff, now a hunched old man, lurks in the background. He gets a hold of the book and the DeLorean and travels back to 1955 to make past Biff a future gazillionaire.

Back to the Future Part II was the movie that taught us about alternate timelines (singular ones, not the theory about all realities occurring at once...that was *Sliders*). When Marty and Doc return to 1985 Hill Valley, something feels “off” at first (“it’s like we’re looking down on Wayne’s basement...”), and then you get the full, terrifying picture: present-day Hill Valley has turned into something that looked like the setting for *Escape from NY* (1981).

Naturally, Marty panics and sets off to investigate, and then again, we get the homages to the first film. Biff’s goons knock Marty out and he comes to with the soothing sound of mother’s voice, only to discover she’s totally different than expected, now looking like a washed up Vegas trophy wife. She catches Marty up on the worst of it, namely that George is dead, his siblings are in trouble, and his mom is married to/blackmailed by Biff who spent the interim raking in cash from sports betting and turning into the biggest piece of shit in Hill



The only book Biff was ever planning to read.

Valley (and maybe on Earth, just like the real person who inspired the character). Marty also discovers that Doc has been institutionalized. Ugh... it’s such a high-anxiety chain of events all at once.

Marty eventually confronts Biff, but Biff was warned by his future self to look out for a teenage kid and his “wide-eyed scientist friend” who might someday come looking for the book, and he reacts accordingly to shut that shit down. Naturally, the time-traveling duo have a better idea: stop 1955 Biff from getting his hands on the Almanac and destroy the damn thing once and for all. And here may be the wildest part of the movie of all, because present-day Marty and present-day Doc are thrown back into 1955 Hill Valley while previous 1985/1955 Marty and 1955 Doc are still living the previous story.

There are some really fantastic sequences, like George punching out teenage Biff at the school dance and the Docs interacting near the clocktower (one is sure to obscure his identity), from an entirely different viewpoint. Again the story is great, but the work involved in mapping out and shooting these scenes is really incredible. Industrial Lights & Magic was starting to work with composite filming, using motion cameras, and trying CGI. It still looks great. *Part II* earnings never peaked as high as the first movie, but it did crack Top 10 earners for 1989 [2]. Don’t let the tonal shift bum you out— particularly sad present-day parallels. If so, a hokey Western might help lighten the mood.

Credits & Endnotes

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Who's Your Daddy?: The Empire Strikes Back

Release Date: May 21, 1980
 Written by: Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan
 Directed by: Irvin Kershner
 Essay by: Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

[1] Referring to—Mr. Plinkett's What Happened to Star Wars? (Red Letter Media, 2025) <https://tinyurl.com/3nf9kptu> though Rich Evans said it even more succinctly, that the early films were unpretentious (Half in the Bag: The Mandalorian and Grogu <https://tinyurl.com/ykw64yrf>)

[2] "Star Wars (film)" <https://tinyurl.com/46vcfk4>

[3] We can't end without acknowledging two more things we love about the Saga: John Williams's fantastic score (Empire introduced "The Imperial March") and Drew Stuzman's fab work on the movie posters, but that probably all goes without saying.

Blood, Sweat, and Potato Salad: Penitentiary II

Release date: April 2, 1982
 Written by: Jamaa Fanaka
 Directed by: Jamaa Fanaka
 Essay by: John Kidwell

[1] "Too Sweet on the Outside - interview with Leon Isaac Kennedy" (2018 Vinegar Syndrome release of Penitentiary II Blu-ray).

[2] "Rocky III" (Box Office Mojo) <https://tinyurl.com/mtnms2fn>

[3] "Penitentiary II" (Box Office Mojo) <https://tinyurl.com/bp6xa8rb>

A Sequel Saves the Franchise: Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan

Release Date: June 4, 1982
 Written by: Harve Bennet, Jack Sowards, Nicholas Meyer
 Directed by: Nicholas Meyer
 Essay by: Sebastian Gregory

[1] "Star Trek: The Motion Picture" (Chicago Sun-Times, 1979) <https://tinyurl.com/mud4m6fh>

[2] "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan" (Box Office Mojo) <https://tinyurl.com/3zbp4k>

[3] "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan" (IMDB) <https://tinyurl.com/3mymrms6>

[4] “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” (Wikipedia)
<https://tinyurl.com/y4r2tvn7>

[5] “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan (Full Cast and Crew)” (IMDB)
<https://tinyurl.com/mrvepvfd>

[6] “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” (Wikipedia)
<https://tinyurl.com/y4r2tvn7>

[7] *ibid*

[8] *ibid*

[9] *ibid*

[10] “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” (Box Office Mojo) <https://tinyurl.com/3zbpXu4k>

Can We Go back to Kansas?: Return to Oz

Release Date: June 21, 1985
 Written by: Walter Murch and Gill Dennis
 Directed by: Walter Murch
 Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] “It has the appeal of an actual horror’: How Return to Oz became one of the darkest children’s films ever made.” (BBC, 2025)
<https://tinyurl.com/4hwcccc3>

[2] The Peanut Butter Solution is a kids movie out of Canada. To read more, check out my article in Girls, on Film Issue 4: The Food Issue

[3] “Return to Oz” (Wikipedia)
<https://tinyurl.com/ycyv5f2r>

[4] “The Dark Side of Oz.” (VoVatia, 2013)
<https://tinyurl.com/48fs6hb4>

[5] “A Return to Oz.” (American Cinematographer, 2023)
<https://tinyurl.com/34bcmv32>

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] “Return to Oz” (Wikipedia)
<https://tinyurl.com/ycyv5f2r>

We’re Not in Reseda Anymore: The Karate Part Kid II

Release Date: June 20, 1986
 Written by: Robert Mark Kamen
 Directed by: John G. Avildsen
 Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] The Karate Kid Part II. Wikipedia.
<https://tinyurl.com/49fj27jw>

[2] “Screen ‘KarateKid Part II’” (The New York Times, 1986)
<https://tinyurl.com/yc6msf7a>

[3] Shoutout to Girl, on Film writer Ed Cash for making this observation.

[4] The Karate Kid Part II (Wikipedia)
<https://tinyurl.com/49fj27jw>

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

Worse Than the First: Teen Wolf Too

Release Date: November 20, 1987
 Written by: R. Timothy Kring
 Directed by: Christopher Leitch
 Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] “Without Meaning or Morals: Teen Wolf” (Girls, on Film, 2025)
<https://tinyurl.com/2vypzhj5>

[2] “Teen Wolf” (Wikipedia)
<https://tinyurl.com/edn89amp>

[3] “Teen Wolf Too (Trivia)” IMDB.
<https://tinyurl.com/bddkmy7m>

[4] “Without Meaning or Morals: Teen Wolf”
 (Girls, on Film, 2025)
<https://tinyurl.com/2vypzhj5>

[5] “Teen Wolf Too” (Vern’s Reviews on the Films
 of Cinema, 2009) <https://tinyurl.com/jd25mftn>

[6] “Teen Wolf Too” (Wikipedia)
<https://tinyurl.com/32u2stmv>

[7] Ibid.

Mind Over Matter: A Nightmare on Elm Street 4—The Dream Master

Released: August 19, 1988

Written by: Wes Craven, William Kotzwinkle,
 Brian Helgeland, Jim & Ken Wheat (as Scott
 Pierce)

Directed by: Renny Harlin

Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] I recognized this furry Hollywood legend as
 the same dog from Two Moon Junction (1988)
 among other films.

[2] Jones boasts an interesting film resume
 but more interestingly, he’s musician who has
 recently performed with Tuesday Knight—the
 Dramarama song best known from this film.

[3] This is one of the whiny internet critic
 stops—how does the dog pissing fire on Freddy’s
 grave in the consecrated ground of the junkyard,
 actually open the grave so we can watch
 Freddy’s bones and tissue, blood and sinew,
 return? Hellhound magic? Dream shenanigans?
 I don’t know whiny critic, but it’s a great effect
 then and now. I can suspend my disbelief of
 which there never was any.

[4] Another stop on the whiny, ruin-everyone’s-
 good-time critic tour: But HOW she transfers
 that power remains unclear! Uh, it’s her dream,

she can create her own reality in there maybe
 since she’s a Dream Warrior who now wants
 to transfer her power through Freddy and
 into Alice. What else do you need to know, for
 heaven’s sake.

[5] The name Dan from the Bible is
 famous for surviving the lion’s den and
 interpreting dreams. This tracks right on to the
 Book of Job opening quote which explores why
 righteous people suffer and questions divine
 justice—both themes which appear in Elm Street
 4 – and is also fitting for the film’s final soul
 battle in a church.

[6] Howard Berger, the B of the now infamous
 KNB and a fourth FX baddie on this film, would
 work under Johnson. Fifth FX baddie John Carl
 Buechler (RIP) would contribute to the famous
 pizza diner scene.

[7] Of course it’s a suburb of Ohio! Why wouldn’t
 it be?!

Lightning Strikes Twice: Back to the Future

Release Date: November 22, 1989

Directed by: Robert Zemeckis

Written by: Bob Gale

Essay by: Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

[1] The Bobs might’ve acquiesced on the first
 two sequels (see “Back to the Future Part II”
 (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/ye2xsbzm>), but
 at least they have put their foot down to avoid
 any further reboots and remakes! “‘Back to the
 Future’ Screenwriter Bob Gale Says There Will
 ‘Never’ Be Another Sequel, ‘Prequel’ or ‘Spinoff’:
 ‘It’s Just Fine the Way It Is’” (Variety, 2025)
<https://tinyurl.com/29dbefhw>

[2] “Domestic Box Office For 1989” (Box Office
 Mojo) <https://tinyurl.com/5es3b42f>

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