

Girls, on Film

The Adaptations Issue

The Outsiders
To Live and Die in L.A.
Stand By Me
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Watchers

Hopelessly Devoted to '80s Movies



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Turning the page.

Welcome to the 11th issue of *Girls, on Film*, the zine that's hopelessly devoted to '80s movies! For each issue, we discuss a handful of '80s movies related to a particular theme. We write about all kinds of movies: the good, bad, or just so-so. Past issues have covered '80s movies about music, sports, summer, food, work, role reversals, entertainers, animation, robots, and road trips. Now, we discuss '80s movies adapted from other works What's on the shelf:

THE OUTSIDERS (1983) Two gangs of teenage boys struggle with class differences in world where adults don't seem to exist.

TO LIVE & DIE IN L.A. (1985) Secret Service agents bend the rules to nab a counterfeiter.

STAND BY ME (1986) Four friends set out to find the body of a missing kid in another story

with absent adults. Sincerely!

84 CHARING CROSS ROAD (1987) An NY writer and Brit bookseller forge a 20-year friendship through letters.

LESS THAN ZERO (1987) This is a story all about how life got flipped turned upside down for a college boy and his friends in L.A.

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY (1988) Michael J. Fox is a coke addict who parties to avoid his grief. It doesn't go well.

THEY LIVE (1987) "Rowdy" Roddy Piper swaps bubblegum for kicking alien ass.

WATCHERS (1988) Corey Haim stars in a docile, R-rated (but feeling PG) reworking of a thick Dean Koontz novel.

Behind the zines.

Girls, on Film was founded by Stephanie McDevitt and Janene Scelza. All digital issues of the zine are available to read, for free, on our website, girlsonfilmzine.com. For information about print copies, collaborations, and trades, drop us a line at info@girlsonfilmzine.com.

STEPHANIE MCDEVITT (CO-EDITOR)

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

JANENE SCELZA (CO-EDITOR)

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

DR. RHONDA BAUGHMAN (CONTRIBUTING WRITER)

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 her own 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 (GUEST WRITER)

Matt loves to dissect and analyze everything. He is stoked to join his sister, Janene, for two essays in this issue. He logged a lot of hours at the same video stores and public library film collections with Janene in search of odd and unusual titles. However, he's got too many favorites to name.



Stay Gold

The Outsiders

Release date: March 25, 1983 | Written by: Kathleen Rowell (screenplay) and S.E. Hinton (story)
Directed by: Francis Ford Coppola | Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

S.E. Hinton, who is generally credited as one of the originators of the modern young-adult fiction genre, wrote *The Outsiders* when she was 16. It was published two years later, in 1967. Hinton was inspired to write the book because she was fed up with the way teenagers were portrayed in fiction. “Everything was Mary-Jane goes to the prom” [1], she wrote. She wanted to give an accurate representation of teenage life as she saw it.

The book, set in Tulsa, OK (Hinton’s hometown) in 1965, was considered controversial at the time it was published due to depictions of gang violence, underage drinking and smoking, and family dysfunction. In fact, the Amer-

ican Library Association ranked it #38 on their list of Top 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–1999 [2]. Despite the controversy, *The Outsiders* is often included in English curriculum for U.S. middle and high school students.

The Outsiders only ended up becoming a movie because it was taught in the small K-8 Lone Star School in Fresno, CA. Their librarian, Jo Ellen Misakian, noticed how many kids were reading the book. When another teacher said it would make a great movie, Misakian decided to start a petition, which eventually garnered 300 signatures. In 1980, she sent the petition and a copy of the book to Francis Ford Coppola, and he decided to take on the project [3].



The conversation that starts it all.

The Outsiders movie remains mostly faithful to the book. S.E. Hinton was on set with Coppola, and she has said that, despite what it says in the credits, they wrote the screenplay together [4]. The story is narrated by 13-year old Ponyboy Curtis (C. Thomas Howell) and centers on his Greaser friends as they deal with the cultural and socio-economic differences between themselves and their rival gang, the Socs (short for "Socials" or "Social Elite").

Ponyboy's parents recently died in a car accident, and he lives with his two brothers, 21-year old Darry (Patrick Swayze) and 16-year old Sodapop (Rob Lowe). They have a tight-knit group of Greaser friends, including Johnny (Ralph Macchio), Two-bit (Emilio Estevez), Steve (Tom Cruise), and Dallas (Matt Dillon). One night, Dallas, Ponyboy, and Johnny all go to the drive-in where they meet Soc girls Cherry (Diane Lane) and Marcia (Michelle Meyrink). Cherry's boyfriend, Bob (Leif Garrett), sees them together and is not happy.

Later that night, Ponyboy is arguing with Darry when Darry hits him. Pony runs away and finds Johnny, and they head out to the park so Ponyboy can cool off. There, Bob and his crew of Socs come driving up, and Bob is still angry that Ponyboy was talking to Cherry. Eventually they attack Pony and Johnny. While Bob and his buddies are holding Ponyboy under water in the fountain, Johnny stabs Bob and kills him.



Johnny is going to turn himself in.

Afraid of going to jail, Pony and Johnny run to find Dallas, who is by far the toughest and craziest of the group. Dallas gives them money and a gun and tells them to hide in an abandoned church in the countryside. The boys spend a week in the church, and eventually Dallas comes to check on them. He tells them that the Socs and Greasers have agreed to a rumble. If the Greasers win, the Socs have to stay out of their territory.

Johnny tells Dallas that he wants to turn himself in, which is a huge decision for any 16-year old. One thing about this story that really works is that Hinton (in the book) and Coppola (in the movie) constantly remind us that these characters are just kids. Whether it's Ponyboy and his brothers eating cake for breakfast, Two-bit's love of Mickey Mouse, or Johnny saying he wants to confess while he's eating a sandwich and has BBQ sauce on his face, these characters (and the actors that play them) are so young.

The Outsiders served as the first major movie role for most of the cast. Swayze, Howell, Cruise, Estevez, and Lowe had only had small roles, mostly on TV, at that point. Matt Dillon was probably the most experienced and best-known member of the cast. According to Wikipedia, Mickey Rourke, Scott Baio, and Dennis Quaid were also considered for this movie [5]. If you watch carefully, you can see Tom Waits, S.E. Hinton, and a young Sofia Coppola in very



Patrick Swayze looking great.



Stay gold, Ponyboy.

small parts. IMDB also says that Flea was an extra, but I didn't see him when I watched.

Despite the cast, this movie is just not that good. It's really slow and awkward at times. At one point, Ponyboy is dreaming about his parents and it shows their car getting hit by a train. It's a jarring scene, but the special effects were weird and it just didn't work. Speaking of the special effects, in one scene the abandoned church Pony and Johnny hide in catches on fire, and they run in to try to save some kids who were trapped inside. The effects of the fire were cheesy and almost cartoon-like in nature. Even for an '80s movie, they could have done better.

Critics didn't like it either. Roger Ebert places the blame on Coppola's direction. He says, "He seems so hung up with his notions of a particular movie "look," with his perfectionistic lighting and framing and composition, that the characters wind up like pictures, framed and hanging on the screen" [6]. I totally agree. Coppola tried so hard to commit to a stylized look that he choked the life out of the movie.

Another issue I had was that Coppola cut out parts of the story. In 2006, he re-released the movie on DVD with 22 extra minutes of footage and called it *The Outsiders: The Complete Novel*. He also reconceived the score to make it more accurate to the time period and added a bunch of DVD extras, including commentary from

most of the original cast [7].

Howell and Macchio are both on the DVD commentary. In an interview for the film's 35th anniversary, they both said that they still talk to school groups about the story. Macchio said, "I went to the school and talked about the book. They had all of these presentations, whether it was poetry, readings, dances, or video, influenced by the film about bullying back in the day versus bullying now and just social class differences, and how they love these characters" [8]. It's pretty cool that they still do this.

Another cool (although weird) thing about this movie is that Ponyboy's house is now The Outsiders House Museum. In 2015, House of Pain member Danny Boy O'Connor purchased the house where the movie was filmed and teamed up with the people of Tulsa to restore it [9]. They officially opened on August 9, 2019 and the ribbon cutting ceremony included Howell and Hinton. Their website says tour tickets are available, but I didn't see a way to buy them (maybe you can't right now) [10].

The Outsiders is often mentioned as a seminal '80s movie, but that's mostly because of the cast. If you decide to watch it, I would look for the 2006 version so you get the entire story. But you could also just read the book, which I think might be a better use of your time.



Mr. Friedkin's Wild Ride To Live and Die in L.A.

Release date: November 1, 1985 | Written by: William Friedkin and Gerald Petievich (screenplay), Gerald Petievich (story) | Directed by: William Friedkin | Essay by: Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

There's no time wasted digging into the action in William Friedkin's 1985 cool cult noir, *To Live and Die in L.A.* Secret Service agent Richard Chance's (William Petersen) Spidey senses start tingling the moment he steps into the hallway of a hotel where Reagan is giving a campaign speech. Within seconds, he is on the roof trying to calm a suicide bomber. Chance's partner, Jim Hart (Michael Greene), quickly intervenes and both agents escape the explosion, winded but unharmed. Based on their reactions, it seems like business as usual.

The film, based on former Secret Service agent Gerald Petievich's novel, reveals an agency that

does more than just guard important public officials. Here, several agents are involved in a tense cat-and-mouse chase with a ruthless counterfeiter and part-time art weirdo, Rick Masters, played by then-unknown Willem Dafoe. It's anything but business as usual.

Friedkin's version sets the story in motion Kung-Fu style. Hart is three days from retirement. Instead of killing time, he goes on a solo stakeout at Masters's printing warehouse. Masters's bodyguard kills Hart, and Chance vows revenge at any cost. But, instead of pan flutes, we get Wang Chung. (Hart is present throughout the novel, which instead begins



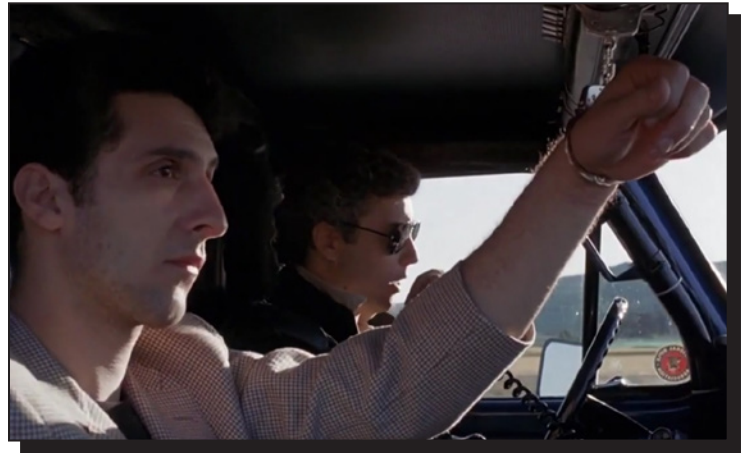
Hart goes dumpster diving.

with Masters wondering if his associate will testify against him).

Had it been a comedy, *To Live and Die in L.A.* could've been a Guy Ritchie film. It's hot-headed machismo on all sides, with cops and criminals alike making increasingly stupid moves that ultimately lead to just about everyone's demise. (Interestingly, the women in the film are just as sly, though subdued, particularly Chance's informant (Darlanne Fluegel) who quietly plots against him. Unfortunately, the women in the novel are ample fodder for the Men Writing Women Twitter account [1]).

Like Friedkin's 1971 Oscar-winning cop thriller, *The French Connection*, *To Live and Die in L.A.* treads the thin line between cop and criminal and their 'interchangeable natures' ..." [2]. Dick Chance and Rick Masters are essentially two sides of the same coin.

William Petersen's character is "one of cinema's most swinging dick, alpha male, douchebag protagonists of all time," wrote Ed Travis of *Cineapse* [3]. Indeed, he's an obsessive asshole, indifferent to all else, invigorated by danger (he gets his kicks BASE jumping). Dafoe's character, on the other hand, is a "quiet and cultured individual" who applies "ruthlessness when it is astute as opposed to wanton cruelty" [4].



Do NOT seek the treasure!

Hart warns Chance that he pushes too hard, takes things too personally, and will never make it to retirement. But, Dick isn't worried about retirement. That doesn't bode well for his new partner, John Vukovich (John Pankow) who struggles to stay on the straight-and-narrow, but is much too impotent to avoid corruption. And, Friedkin isn't the least bit interested in redemption arcs.

It's a great set-up, though discussions about the film tend to focus on its big climax. That's probably because the middle of the film is a sort of whirlwind of events. Chance looks for opportunities to bring down Masters and Masters looks to tie up loose ends: a double-crossing client; the aforementioned mule (John Turturro) wondering when Masters's lawyer (Dean Stockwell) will bail him out; a botched hit; and idiots spending his funny money.

Eventually, Chance and Vukovich approach Masters, posing as Palm Beach cons looking for a printer. Masters isn't too sure they're for real, so he agrees to do the job for a hell of a lot more front money than the agency will let them play with. Chance, tipped off by his informant, hatches an incredibly risky plan to get the cash.

This all culminates in one of those crazy-ass trademark Friedkin car chases. (See also Gene Hackman beating a car to hell racing through



Rick Masters makes some play dough.

the streets of NYC while Marcel Bozzuffi flees above in the subway in *The French Connection*). Friedkin & Co. crank it to 11 this time around, as Chance and Vukovich dodge various snipers, trains, and oncoming traffic.

Friedkin is one of those directors that wants real reactions from his actors. "[He] batter[s] the audience with details that made them feel as if they were right there next to the characters." [5] Indeed, Petersen actually was behind, weaving through the obstacles, going back and forth from anxious to exhilarated. Meanwhile, Pankow looks like he's going to piss his pants watching all this from the backseat.

The ending comes at you quick, departing from Petievich's novel (which was interested in redemption). So, too, departs the sitcom-sounding alternative ending that Friedkin thankfully refused to use: Chance and Vukovich are transferred to Alaska while their supervisor (Robert Downey, Sr.) basically takes all the credit for nabbing Masters [6].

To Live and Die in L.A. is a great story (the novel is pretty good, too [7]), is non-stop intensity, beautifully filmed, and is superbly acted low-budget thriller. Unfortunately, the film was not a commercial hit. At the time of its release, too many critics seemed hung up on whether the film marked a career high or low for Fried-



The Amazing Chase.

kin who, aside from *The French Connection*, was also best known for *The Exorcist* (1973). Roger Ebert seemed to be the only to praise it [8].

Critics also seemed to unfairly compare the movie to *Miami Vice*, as though Crockett, Tubbs, or all of Miami for that matter, had the monopoly on fashionable cops, stylish settings, and pop soundtracks. (Granted, the show premiered one year before this movie came out, but for all it's celebrated style, it didn't take long to become a horrendous fashion victim). However, the glitz and glam and L.A.'s seedy industrial side was key to a movie about authenticity and forgeries. And cinematographer Robby Müller -- who, before this, was shooting car chases in the L.A. River for *Repo Man* (1984) -- makes it look so gorgeous.

Recent reviewers have been more positive about the film, presumably because it's not a movie you talk about unless you have already seen it, and presumably liked it (like us!).

Naturally, the movie found a cult following on the home video circuit. *Deadline* reported in 2015 that it was being turned into a TV series, with Friedkin directing and producing and Bobby Moresco (*Crash*) writing [9]. With no further news, should we assume WGN, MGM, and Tribute Studios passed? Well, in any event, the film is definitely worth tracking down!



Cherry Flavored PEZ Stand By Me

Release date: August 8, 1986 | Written by: Bruce A. Evans and Raynold Gideon (screenplay)
Stephen King (story) Directed by: Rob Reiner | Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

Based on the Stephen King semi-autobiographical novella *The Body*, *Stand By Me* is a coming-of-age classic. Set in the same time period as *The Outsiders*, this movie also follows a group of boys who are forced to come to terms with mortality at a young age. However, where *The Outsiders* fails, *Stand By Me* succeeds. With good performances and great directing, *Stand By Me* delicately straddles the line between childhood and adulthood and presents four convincing characters who are all grappling with what it means to grow up.

Most of *Stand By Me* takes place in the waning days of the summer of 1959 in Castle Rock, Oregon. A local kid named Ray Brower has gone

missing. Four friends – Gordie (Wil Wheaton), Chris (River Phoenix), Vern (Jerry O’Connell), and Teddy (Corey Feldman) – are hanging out when Vern says he overheard his brother say he found Ray Brower’s body. Chris and Teddy decide they should go retrieve the body. Caught up in the idea that they will be hailed as heroes, the boys pack their things and begin the 30-mile journey to bring Ray Brower home.

All four boys are dealing with some pretty heavy stuff. Gordie’s brother Denny (John Cusack) was recently killed in a car accident. Teddy’s dad is in an institution after holding Teddy’s head to the stove and burning his ear. Chris comes from a family of thieves and hood-



When I look at you, I throw up!

lums and is routinely beaten by both his dad and brothers. Vern fears his older brother.

On their way out of town, they make a stop at the local junkyard to fill up their canteens. When the junkyard owner catches them trespassing on his property, he threatens to call their parents. When Teddy snaps back, the junkyard owner calls Teddy's dad a looney. Teddy loses his mind, and the other boys have to drag him away. Teddy, in tears, apologizes for ruining everybody's good time. Gordie says that they're going to find a dead kid. Maybe it shouldn't be a good time.

Over the course of their 30-mile journey, the boys have run-ins with an attack dog, a speeding train, and a pond full of leeches. They talk about mindless 12-year-old boy stuff – the size of Annette Funicello's chest and who could win in a fight between Mighty Mouse and Superman. But, this trip morphs into much more than a camp out with friends. Chris details his struggle living under the cloud of his family. Gordie talks about how his father hates him and how he didn't cry at Denny's funeral. It's a lot of adult conversation for a couple of 12-year-olds.

As the boys slowly make their trek, a gang led by Ace Merrill (Kiefer Sutherland), which includes Chris's and Vern's older brothers, head out to find the body. Ace and his goons are bad



Chris brings a gun to a knife fight.

news, and they also think they'll be famous by bringing Ray Brower home. The movie comes to a head when they all arrive at the body at the same time.

Stand By Me is one of my all-time favorite movies. I was happy to see that Rob Reiner lists it as his favorite directorial project. He also said it was the film that gave him confidence. According to the Chicago Tribune, "the comedic brilliance of his celebrated writer-director father, Carl Reiner, cast what you might call a pall in the family. 'I grew up thinking that my father thought I didn't have any talent.'" Reiner identified with Gordie, and overcame his insecurities while directing this movie [1]. However, he almost didn't make *Stand By Me* at all.

Originally, Embassy Pictures had planned to produce the movie and Adrian Lyne was set to direct. It took four months to negotiate with Stephen King's agent and another 8 weeks to write the screenplay. At that point Lyne had just finished filming *9 1/2 Weeks* and wanted to take a vacation, so he was not available to start filming until spring of '86 [2].

Lyne withdrew from the project, and Rob Reiner took over. At the time, Reiner was mostly known as Meathead in *All in the Family*. He also had a few directing credits, including *This is Spinal Tap* and *The Sure Thing*. Once Reiner got the script, he decided to make Gordie the main



Follow the tracks or cut across the field?

character. In the book, it is Chris [3].

In an interview with *Variety*, Reiner said, “In the initial version, Gordie was just one of the four characters. He was an observer. He wasn’t the main focus of it. Then I was like this is about a kid who has insecure feelings about himself. He’s driven to go see this body, because he never cried at his brother’s funeral and his father always paid more attention to his older brother who died” [4]. Once he made Gordie the center of the movie, Reiner said it made sense to him [5].

Reiner auditioned more than 300 boys for this movie. In an interview with NPR, Wil Wheaton said, “Rob Reiner found four young boys who basically *were* the characters we played” [6]. River Phoenix originally read for the role of Gordie, and Ethan Hawke auditioned for the role of Chris Chambers. For the older version of Gordie, Reiner considered David Dukes and Michael McKean before deciding on Richard Dreyfuss [7].

Just days before filming was to begin, Columbia Pictures bought Embassy Pictures and was going to cancel the movie despite the fact that the entire crew was in Oregon and ready to go. Norman Lear, who was co-owner of Embassy Pictures, agreed to finance the movie with \$7.5 million of his own money (Lear knew Reiner from their work on *All in the Family*). Columbia



Kiefer Sutherland is always the asshole.

Pictures agreed to distribute the movie, so Reiner and his crew were in business [8].

Stand By Me did well at the box office (despite mixed reviews) raking in a little over \$52 million. It was nominated for a bunch of awards, including the Academy Award for best adapted screenplay, Golden Globe for best motion picture and director, and Directors Guild of America award for outstanding directing [9]. They also earned a compliment from Stephen King, who said it was the first adaptation of his stories that got it right [10].

The movie was filmed in several locations, but all the Castle Rock scenes were filmed in Brownsville, OR. Today, Brownsville celebrates the movie with a *Stand By Me* Day, held every July 23. There are movie viewings, costume contests, and blueberry pie sales. Unfortunately, the 2020 *Stand By Me* Day was canceled, but the Brownsville Chamber commerce has a map for a walking tour of movie locations. You can visit the town any time [11].

Stand By Me is funny, sad, and very charming. It’s also one of the rare cases where the movie is better than the book. The four young actors turned in great performances that advanced all of their careers. River Phoenix really stands out and gives a great (albeit sad) glimpse of what could have been. I highly recommend checking it out if you haven’t seen it.



The Way We Were

84 Charing Cross Road

Release date: February 13, 1987 | Written by: Hugh Whitmore (screenplay), Helene Hanff (story)
Directed by: David Jones | Essay by: Janene Scelza

And now... for something a little more upbeat!

Back in the day, when the well ran dry at the local video stores for titles on my ridiculously long and ever-growing list of '80s movies to track down, I would turn to the very dated VHS collection at the Orlando Public Library. (OPL really upped their game around the early 2000s). It was there that I discovered a wonderful little film called *84 Charing Cross Road*.

From its cover art to production values, *84 Charing Cross Road* looks like a PBS Movie of the Week. It's a kind of long-distance "love story" between a bibliophile and a bibliomites [1] set

in a charming, bygone era. The 1987 dramedy, starring Anne Bancroft -- who wasn't doing much seducing by the late 1980s -- and Sir Anthony Hopkins, is a nearly verbatim adaptation of Helene Hanff's 1971 epistolary memoir of the same name. A collection of letters trace her decades-long friendship with British bookseller, Frank Doel (Hopkins), as well as a few extended acquaintances, such as a Doel's wife, Nora, played by a nearly unrecognizable Judi Dench. (The wonderful Mercedes Ruehl, of *Big* (1988); Connie Booth, of *Fawlty Towers*; and Ian McNeice, of *Doc Martin* fame, also have small roles).

Helene Hanff was a New York-based play-



Frank Doel digs through an estate sale.

wright and television script editor of modest note. Later in her career, she turned to magazine writing and eventually, books. *84 Charing Cross Road* was her most popular work.

The memoir was also adapted for theater, radio, and television, including a small screen version starring the late, great Elaine Stritch. More recently, Gillian Anderson portrayed Hanff in a Christmas Day radio broadcast for the BBC [2]. The film came to fruition when Mel Brooks bought the rights to *84 Charing Cross Road* as a birthday gift for his wife, Anne Bancroft [3]. Her performance is probably the reason I adore this movie so much. (To Hanff's surprise, Bancroft even sounded like her!) [4].

The story begins in October 1949. An ad in the *Saturday Review of Literature* prompts Hanff's first letter to Mark & Co., a bookstore in London specializing in out-of-print books. A "poor writer with an antiquarian taste in books," particularly British nonfiction, she faces the common dilemma of niche pursuits: supply and demand. She explains in her letter that the books she desires can only be found in the city in the form of expensive rare editions or "grimy, marked-up school boy copies," if she could find them at all. Frank Doel responds, as he would to the majority of Hanff's letters over the years, fulfilling some requests and promising to track down others.



Breaking the fourth wall.

Hanff and Doel would continue writing to one another for almost twenty years, sharing their lives from different post-war worlds: she from her cheerful, affluent Upper East Side neighborhood and he from a drab-colored, genteel London still very much recuperating. In addition to the letters, Hanff often sent Marks & Co. staff and their families holiday food parcels and other hard-to-find items at a time when the British were still forced to ration.

Hanff described her plays as "plotless charm" [5], and the same can be said of *84 Charing Cross Road* in all of its incarnations. There are so few embellishments to the script, it pretty much remains a story with no real beginning, middle, and end. Instead, it's a madly endearing meandering through their lives.

84 Charing Cross Road is a tale fit for anyone who finds that interesting, but book lovers in particular are (obviously?) sure to relate. Hanff fawns over the physical quality the books Doel sends. ("Being used to the dead-white paper and stiff cardboard covers of American books, I never knew a book could be such a joy to the touch"). She adores notes left by previous owners. ("I like the comradely sense of turning pages someone else turned and reading passages someone long gone has called my attention to"). She gives emphatic critiques. ("Kindly inform the Church of England they have loused



Is that Helene in the shop?

up the most beautiful prose ever written..."). For the Spring, she requests romantic poetry from "writers who can make love without slobbering."

I described this film as a kind of love story (and just realized the dust jacket does, too). But it's not a love story in the romantic sense. Some viewers will no doubt be eager to ship Bancroft and Hopkins. They are an adorable yin and yang of personalities: Hanff as that old-fashioned New York Jewish lady, full of wry humor and good-natured ribbing, and Doel as the reserved gentlemanly Brit.

But the love here is the bond of great friends. As time goes along, we become eager for the two to finally meet. Unfortunately, these were the days before cheap overseas flights. Also, Hanff herself was supposedly resistant to travel. In one scene, Frank perks up at the possibility that a customer who drops by the shops asking about classical literature is Helene. Eventually she makes plans to visit, but later informs Doel that she must postpone because she needs some expensive dental work. His disappointment is palpable.

The filmmakers sort of throw us a bone, using a technique originated from the stage play. Eventually, Bancroft and Hopkins abandon voice-overs to address the camera directly, cutting



Old acquaintances not forgotten.

back and forth for each others' response. For a moment, we can forget that the words they speak actually come from the letters.

Hanff did make the sojourn to London, but not before Doel's unexpected death in December 1968. (This also means Bancroft and Hopkins never actually share a scene together). Marks & Co. would close the following year [6]. In an interview during the making of the film, Hanff said that she felt compelled to document the story precisely because of Frank Doel's death. "It never occurred to me that a business correspondence was going to make a book. When he died, I had a terrible need to recreate it in some permanent form for me, the way other people would want a photographic album" [7].

Hanff loved Hugh Whitmore's script (he also wrote the 1975 screenplay), joking that she'd take care of herself to live long enough for its release. (She died in 1997). Glimpses of her pilgrimage to London in 1971 bookend the film, but Hanff chronicled the trip in her next memoir, *The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street*.

84 Charing Cross Road is just a simple, sweet little film. It was generally a hit with critics when it was released, and people are still writing just as lovingly about the book and film to this day. You can rent the film online, though I also recommend the memoir -- it's a quick read.



Pick Your Poison

Less Than Zero

Release date: November 6, 1987 | Written by: Harley Peyton (screenplay), Bret Easton Ellis (story)
Directed by: Marek Kaniévská | Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

Spoiler alert! [1]: the book and the film have wildly distinct endings. Published in 1985 and theatrically released in 1987, a confessional fiction drama, *Less than Zero* also straddles the Christmas genre. Then again, some can argue *Die Hard* (1988) also falls within this same category, but *Zero* might not appeal to the “let’s gather ‘round a roaring fire and spend time with family” element – not unless you want to teach loved ones a lesson about “drugs are bad/too much money is also bad.”

It’s astonishing how both book and film still hold multiple touchstones for Generation X and Xennials: fashion, music, addiction, drugs, drinks, living quarters, décor, the L.A. experi-

ence... the list goes on. It’s also still the madly loved or hotly hated – or madly loving to hotly hate – first novel from literary bad lad Bret Easton Ellis [2].

His work in the contemporary film and lit scene (as well as his Patreon podcast) might hold some contention and confusion, like his latest screenplay for *Smiley Face Killers* (2020) and essay collection *White* (2019), but *Less than Zero* was once the blueprint some used for defining success and moderation in our youth – and still, well into our adulthood. We’re also strangely proud of this fact and refuse to let the connection go. It could even be said some of us are still jealous of Ellis’s continued relevancy and



Clay gets dapper for debauchery.

natural storytelling superpowers.

After a champagne-filled, sunny L.A. high school graduation, golden couple half, Clay (Andrew McCarthy), leaves his cushy Cali scene for an east coast school. His, arguably, better half Blair (Jami Gertz) breaks their original plans to leave with him, staying behind to focus on her modeling career – and boink BFF Julian (Robert Downey, Jr.). They've all known each other forever, so what's a little sharing between friends? No one seems particularly upset in the book, and in the film Clay's and Blair's expressions rarely change, so it's hard to tell.

I can't blame her – in a flashback sequence, Blair shares her real feelings and bares some soul. Clay acknowledges less than zero of her candor, dickishly dragging her career choice. He tells her she should try something "more challenging, like being a game show host. We need more game show hosts." These lines weren't in the novel. "You look pale," uttered when Clay and Blair reunite six months later during Clay's holiday visit, was in both. (The screenplay probably needed more attention).

The novel is character-driven, with activities limited to the debauched to-do list of a college kid home on break. An iconic opening line "People are afraid to merge" traveling alongside an ominous phrase like "Disappear Here"



Blair, in a bona fide MTV Crib.

and lyrical snatches of old tunes of the era helps the novel's last line resonate for an uncomfortably long time.

Something I noticed in re-reading the novel after 20-odd years: there is a heavy Didion influence. Some will say *Play It As It Lays* (1970) was a huge influence, but I then also have to suggest her famous passage on the Santa Ana winds from *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1969): "To live with the Santa Ana, is to accept, consciously or unconsciously, a deeply mechanistic view of human behavior."

Both Didion and Ellis can create characters who are mechanistic at best, sociopathic ennui mannequins at worst, and my, do both authors *love* the wind motif. It's positively, endlessly gusty, blustery, breezy, and stormy within the pages of *Bethlehem* and *Zero*. I wanted the song lyrics (as literary device) to advance the plot in *Zero*, but strangely, it's the wind. Additionally, the same Didion excerpt shows appreciation of the random acts of senseless violence in the news, man's brutal callousness to man, because Clay notes it, too in the same detached manner. Neither the wind nor the literary summit of Didion's writing ability make it to the film.

The film adds a bit of plot tension, giving Clay and Blair some verbal and physical fight scenes while they drive around a lot to try and save



Julian: little boy blue.



Rip means business.

Julian from himself, his massive drug debt, and his smarmy dealer (James Spader). Regrettably, all efforts fail and only two of the three return to the matters of mortals – in the movie. The novel has a much more open ending; everyone lives to make it to the sequel – *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010), although, a recent re-read of *that* novel was mildly traumatic. Some characters were made to be sorry they survived in *Zero*, or the reader was sorry for them.

But in the '80s, one would be hard-pressed to find a lovelier cast to feel sorry for. Ellis and I share the same infatuation with Gertz (mine *might* be stronger). McCarthy (like Gertz) can rock the fashion and hair of the era, but he would make his most important mark as a real-life writer. Downey, Jr. was beautiful boy who would mature to damn beautiful man status later and shrug off that naughty boy veneer. And, Spader? Well, he's predator pretty and has all the good lines in *Zero* – and the most range *if* you remove the obvious competition with Downey's real-life drug issues.

I adore cinematographer Edward Lachmanto's shimmery vision with light play. Every scene in the movie is rhythmic, mesmerizing – a color palette of hypnotic excess (befitting a major theme) I wouldn't see again until *Drive* (2011).

Surprisingly, I would not notice any product

placement for Tab in the film, considering it's mentioned in the book. Discontinued at the end of 2020, some of us took to eBay for over-priced cases of the drink to say goodbye. Not because we liked Tab, but because Tab was beloved by Blair and she was a part of a beloved novel.

Some of us did that kind of thing a lot. We still do. We dug for the music not featured on the soundtrack and so discovered Jimi Hendrix, The Doors, and Run D.M.C. We brought a chilled bottle of Perrier-Jouet to a party so we could talk about its literary significance with a rock star. We ordered sake and took pictures with payphones and wandered around the USC campus. We went to concerts and hit the club circuit while on the lookout for local cable access station cameras.

We studied minimalist sex scenes because they apparently didn't *have* to involve penetration. We read *Less than Zombie* [3] because we found another writer as obsessed with Ellis. We visited LA hot spots. Some of us even rocketed out of our hometowns, just like Clay, to see what else was out there.

Can you imagine writing the novel and creating the film that 30+ years later, people still think about, review, revisit, and interact with? I do. It's all I think about some days, especially after I left.



Great Minds Sink Alike

Bright Lights, Big City

Release date: April 1, 1988 | Written by: Jay McInerney (screenplay and story)
Directed by: James Bridges | Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

Bright Lights, Big City is an adaptation that stays remarkably true to the original novel, which I really appreciate. This was my first reading and viewing of *Bright Lights*, and I read the book first, which is usually the order I prefer. By the time I finished reading, I was excited to see how Michael J. Fox would handle this role and wondered what it would be like to watch Marty McFly snort a bunch of coke.

Bright Lights, Big City follows 24-year-old Jamie Conway (Michael J. Fox) as he goes on a week-long bender. The movie starts with Jamie partying at 6am in a New York City night-club. Saturday night has stretched into Sunday

morning and he can't bring himself to go home. His apartment is full of reminders of his wife Amanda (Phoebe Cates), who left him a few months ago to pursue her modeling career in Paris. Eventually, the lights come on and Jamie is forced out into the real world.

Cut to Monday, Jamie gets a call from his co-worker Megan (Swoosie Kurtz) making sure he's awake. He realizes he overslept, and he hustles to get to his office. Jamie works in the Department of Factual Verification at a huge NY magazine, and it is clear at the start of the movie that he has come to despise his job. On this particular day, his boss, Clara (Frances



Megan is always trying to help Jamie.

Sternhagen), assigns him “the French piece,” which is apparently in terrible shape in terms of factual accuracy and is due at the end of the day. Jamie knows he won’t finish, but he refuses help and sets out to fail on his own.

At 10pm, Jamie is still at the office and realizes he’s not going to make any more progress on the French piece. He leaves it for Clara, knowing it’s a mess, and heads home. While originally planning a quiet night in, Jamie’s party buddy, Tad Allagash (Kiefer Sutherland), shows up and insists that Jamie come out with him. And so starts another all-night party. Tad tries to help Jamie get girls by telling them his wife died. At one point, Tad tells some girl that Amanda died of Leukemia. Jamie tells him that’s not funny because his mom died of cancer.

Tad and Jamie keep partying, and Jamie keeps showing up for work late. Eventually Clara finds out that the French piece - which was published - was not at all accurate. She fires Jamie, which just makes him spiral even more. He goes on a series of coke-fueled, drunken misadventures. He never sleeps or eats, and it’s apparent that his cocaine use is a problem. With his life in shambles, he needs to stop the party merry-go-round. The end of the movie is vague as to Jamie’s future, but you can draw your own positive or negative conclusions.



Kiefer in another silly role.

Bright Lights, Big City the novel was written by Jay McInerney and released in 1984. Columbia Pictures was the first studio to work with McInerney to turn the book into a movie, and, from what I read, pre-production was a nightmare. McInerney wrote the first draft of the screenplay. Jerry Weintraub was tapped to produce the film, and when he left Columbia and joined United Artists as a chief executive, he took the movie with him [1].

Weintraub turned producing duties over to Sydney Pollack and Mark Rosenberg, who hired Julie Hinson to write the script. Tom Cruise, who was going to play Jamie, got tired of waiting for a script, and Weintraub left United Artists, so the movie got caught up in his settlement with the studio. United ended up keeping the movie and decided to shoot it in Toronto with an unknown actor in the lead [2].

Then the studio hired Joyce Chopra to write the script and direct the movie. She got Michael J. Fox involved, and, at his request, they hired Kiefer Sutherland to play Tad Allagash. The studio moved the movie back to NY and started filming. After a month, the studio fired Chopra (at a time when a slew of women were being fired from directing jobs [3]), hired James Bridges, and let him rewrite the script. However, in the end they used the original script that McInerney wrote, and he and Bridges worked



Diane Wiest is excellent.

on revisions together, although McNerney has a solo screenwriting credit [4].

According to McNerney, Chopra's script had cut out all of the drug use. She says that was because the studio told her to cut it. Apparently, the head honchos were afraid to tarnish Fox's image [5]. I mean, what would Alex P. Keaton think of all that cocaine? The book and the movie ended up being very similar in terms of plot, so I'm glad they kept McNerney's script.

Even though the script remained true to the book, the movie was not a box office hit. It came in about \$9 million short of its original budget [6]. Reviews were mixed, but I also thought some of the reviewers missed the point. Roger Ebert asks of Jamie, "Is he (a) an alcoholic, using the coke so he can stay awake and drink more? Or (b) a cokehead, using the booze to level off?" [7]. I didn't think he was either.

Intertwined throughout the movie is the story of Jamie's mom (Diane Wiest), who died of cancer. He is creeping up to the 1-year anniversary of her death, which is a great explanation for Jamie's behavior. Yes, he has a substance abuse issue, but the grief of losing his mother is really what's fueling him. The movie does a great job of showing this by inserting flashbacks of Jamie by his mom's bedside. Towards the film's end, Jamie's brother shows up to make



Jamie, eating for the first time in a week.

him come home for the anniversary, but Jamie literally runs away from him. He's self-medicating and trying to escape the grief. In the end, the grief is going to catch up.

Michael J. Fox was good as Jamie, and it was nice to see him do something different. As I mentioned earlier, producers originally tapped Tom Cruise for the role, but it's hard to imagine him in it. Another casting decision that could have been very different was for the part of Tad Allagash. Possible actors for that role included Judd Nelson, Emilio Estevez, Sean Penn, Kevin Bacon, and Rob Lowe [8]. Sutherland was a good decision as he brings such a slimy presence to Allagash that I'm not sure any of those other actors could have captured.

In addition to the film, *Bright Lights, Big City* became an off-Broadway musical in 1999, written by the creative team from *Rent* (except Jonathan Larson) and starring Patrick Wilson [9]. Despite bad reviews, it got a professional run in the UK in 2010. Also in 2010, there was talk of Josh Schwartz (*Gossip Girl*) doing a remake. Thankfully, it never happened.

In the end, *Bright Lights, Big City* is worth reading and watching. It gives a great look at trying to survive the NYC party circuit in the '80s. It's also an accurate commentary on the effects of death and the losing battle to outrun your grief.



Do You See What I See? **They Live**

Release date: November 4, 1988 | Written by: Frank Armitage (pseudonym; screenplay); Ray Nelson (story) | Directed by: John Carpenter | Essay by: Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

The San Dimas Circle K wasn't the only place where strange things were afoot in the late '80s. In John Carpenter's 1988 cult sci-fi, *They Live*, an ordinary blue-collar and extraordinarily beefy shmo named Nada (played by former WWF wrestler, "Rowdy" Roddy Piper) arrives in Hollywood's favorite urban dystopia — Los Angeles — looking for work. Eventually, he lands a construction job and takes up residency at a bustling homeless camp called Justiceville. That's when Nada makes a pretty eerie discovery: ALIENS!!!

Yup! Turns out a nefarious race of aliens who subscribe to Gordon Gecko's infamous motto "Greed is Good" have infiltrated the whole

planet. They're disguised as humans and use subliminal messages to exploit the masses. *Obey. Consume. Reproduce. Die.* Rinse and repeat. A special pair of sunglasses reveal the truth. *The Live* is a Baby's First Leftist Movie, with its absurdly overt political messages and woke soul(s) who suddenly discover, and then single-handedly declare war on, an impossibly unfair system. The film was Carpenter's "primal scream" [1] against the rampant greed and utter phoniness (aka, everything bad is good for you [2]) of the Reagan era. He saw it as a period that trampled on the values he grew up with [3].

Not surprisingly, the cult favorite has become a hot topic in various film commentary media in



House Hunters: They Live Edition.



The Bronswik Affair.

recent years. The exhausting viciousness of so-called American individualism (better known as “fuck you, I got mine”) rears its ugly head once more, exponentially worse, in the Trump age. Carpenter told *Esquire* a month before the 2020 U.S. presidential election: “The whole direction of the [United States], this return to fascism and white supremacy – all of that! I lived through all that back in the ‘50s and ‘60s. It’s not new. It’s just returned to the surface. It’s been submerged, but now it’s back up on the surface again. And it’s just disheartening” [4].

Cathartic as the project may have been for Carpenter, the story didn’t originate with him, nor screenwriting partner Roddy Piper (credited together under the Lovecraftian pseudonym Frank Armitage). *They Live* actually expands on Ray Nelson’s 1963 short story, “Eight O’Clock in the Morning,” which, interestingly, was Nelson railing against the manipulative power of TV [5].

In the short story, George Nada (changed to John in the film) doesn’t need special shades to see the lizard people. He becomes “awakened” after a hypnosis session, kind of like Peter Gibbons in *Office Space*. Nelson’s title refers to the time of day that ol’ George is supposed to kick the bucket. For his final act, he uses the aliens’ broadcast against them. Mimicking their

reptilian voice, he urges viewers to “Wake up! Wake up! See us as we are and kill us!” [6]. George dies, but the war begins. (Ray Nelson and Bill Wray turned the story into a comic in 1986 [7]. Carpenter borrows from one of the comic’s final panels to end the film).

In Carpenter’s version, Nada is not alone in discovering the aliens. A small resistance group that stumbled upon the subliminal messages “quite by accident” secretly operate out of an office near Justiceville. They use pirate satellites to interfere with the aliens’ broadcasts. In one scene, a man suddenly appears on TV to warn viewers that “they are dismantling the sleeping middle class.” He cuts out before explaining who *they* are. It’s too late, anyways. The aliens catch on, and Justiceville is raided by the cops. In the aftermath, Nada finds the sunglasses.

Despite the grim context for the film -- with recent analysis tending to focus on manipulation and agency -- *They Live* is really a silly, Capra-esque B-movie. Nada is a comically naive, clumsy hero who is as antiquated as the literal black-and-white alien reality that he seeks to expose. Basically, he’s the Jefferson Smith (Jimmy Stewart’s doe-eyed protagonist in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*) of the science fiction world, but with a mullet and muscles. Nada’s co-worker is Frank, a part specifically



Who wants a body massage?!



Don't fuck with the cable industry.

written for actor Keith David, who previously starred in Carpenter's 1982 alien-horror film, *The Thing*. He also lives at Justiceville, and spends most the first half of the movie venting about the plight of the working class.

Like Nada, Frank came to L.A. for work after the factories closed in Detroit, where his wife and kids still live. But unlike Nada, he doesn't need special glasses to arrive at a pretty obvious conclusion: "he who has the gold makes the rules." (It's just that those who have the gold happen to be from another planet). When Frank asks Nada how he plans to survive, Nada espouses the age-old "bootstrap" nonsense: "I deliver a hard day's work for the money. I just want the chance. It'll come. I believe in America. I follow the rules. Everybody's got their own hard times these days."

Once Nada witnesses the ugly reality, he (and reluctant sidekick, Frank) save the day the All-American action star way: brawn and bullets. It seems that his two most memorable contributions to the film are the oft-parodied catchphrase, "I came here to chew bubblegum and kick ass, and I'm all out of bubblegum" (remarkably said with a straight face) and a ridiculously long fight sequence between Nada and Frank in which Nada is trying to convince Frank to put on the glasses. Sure, he'd probably

be the best ally, but all the guy wants to do is keep his head down so he doesn't lose his job. But, Nada's fists are pretty convincing. From there, it's pure B-movie silliness leading up to the big showdown at the cable station where Nada and Frank try to destroy the aliens' transmitter. (Check out Meg "Lost in Your Eyes" Foster as a sneaky alien collaborator).

They Live was intentionally released mere days before the 1988 U.S. presidential election [8]. While the film spent two weeks in the North American box office Top 10, it was ultimately a commercial flop. [9]. Naturally, it would find a cult audience via the home video circuit. It also established Roddy Piper as a credible B-movie action star, and he certainly pulled it off better than a number of other pro-wrestlers who tried to make that transition.

There were talks in 2010 about a remake with Matt Reeves (*Cloverfield*) writing and directing and Carpenter producing. However, Reeves wanted to drop the satire and politics and focus more on the "emotional side, the nightmare experience with the paranoia of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* or a Roman Polanski-style film" [10]. Reeves has since moved on to other blockbuster projects. In the meantime, we recommend the 1988 film!



Private Eyes are Watching You Watchers

Release date: December 2, 1988 | Written by: Bill Freed and Damian Lee (screenplay)
Dean R. Koontz (story) | Directed by: Jon Hess | Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

Snuggled within the sweet oblivion of the 1980s there was a team for each Corey: Corey Feldman and Corey Haim. But in 1987, the teams merged into mighty circuit, and the dynamic duo was born with *The Lost Boys*. Unless you wish to mention at length the autographed *Lost Boys* 5-foot standee I still own, then there was nothing quite like seeing *License to Drive* (1988) in the theater and hearing the live clapping and cheering and squeaking from fans in the audience when each Corey's name zoomed in and off screen in the opening credits. I was 10-years old and afraid to clap too loudly; my mother took me to the theater to see it and was fast asleep by the time either Corey made an appearance [1].

Naturally, when Haim starred alongside then-girlfriend Lala [2] in *Watchers* (1988), many of us expected romantic alchemy. And when those magical visions of the doe-eyed Haim in a Dean Koontz adaptation did not come, we were left with a docile, R-rated (but feeling PG) Roger Corman (as producer) and Jon Hess (as director) reworking of the thick title, followed by three Corman sequels – *Watchers II* (1990), *Watchers 3* (1994) and *Watchers Reborn* (1998), none of which really expanded Koontz's concept, but instead all strangely imitate one another to varying degrees. No romance either, just one make out scene reminiscent of many teenage make out sessions – that is, it's prematurely interrupted and awkward.



Travis gets some homework help.



Bad Boy Brandon Walsh, pre-90210.

The Koontz novel is fairly epic. It's definitely a classic among mass-market paperback snobs such as myself, but the first film takes several (and seemingly random) liberties that stifles the vibes, giving the film an almost made-for-tame-TV quality. *Watchers* is an insidious concept, and one for the ages and conspiracy theorist in all of us, too: sneaky government organization doing sneaky things in the name of future sneaky warfare possibilities. Sneaky creatures escape from a shifty lab and one sneaky man (with sidekicks) must brave extraordinary and sneaky dangers (the Feds, a Soviet-hired assassin, genetically-engineered creature, unevenly unfolding plot) to help save mankind. Stakes are high; everyone is sneaky.

It could have been much more fun than it was (book) and much more believable (film). Although a fan of both the novel and film as a youngster, in re-watching, I found it hard to focus within the film's docile confines of low-level gore and off-screen kills. Haim is disconcertingly boyish, hyper-aware of the camera, and speaks too loudly with a sort of "someone's possibly listening" tone, even when alone or speaking to the dog he befriends.

In the Koontz novel, the lab-escaped antagonist is called the Outsider and reluctant hero Travis Cornell is a former Delta Force operative.

In the film, we have a furry boogie monster named OXCAM (Outside Experimental Combat Mammal) mostly running amok and a plucky teen/cool mom combo. Haim's performance/demeanor for Travis distracts from the unfolding plot [3], as does his mom Nora's performance (portrayed by Barbara Williams). Haim is overstated and Williams understated. Only the performance of the adorable and intelligent golden retriever (Einstein in the novel, FurFace in the adaptation, and Sandy in real life) remains consistent throughout the film .

The cute and dynamic characters Haim was previously known for waned considerably in *Watchers*. I'll not speculate on his tragic life and long battle with addiction here, but he does have a strange pallor and hairstyle in this film we would see again in *Dream a Little Dream* (1989) [4]. Also, why someone did not get Wardrobe to fix the strategic holes in the seat of his jeans?! Furthermore, while the online search does not yield the answer for *Who chose Haim's Watchers' wardrobe?*, there are several sites dedicated to Haim-inspired merchandise, including but not limited to tees and jewelry. I would speculate, from his films, that he loved fashion, and it's a question I would ask if he were still alive.

Koontz's work has subplots involving the Sovi-



Check out this incriminating tape I found!

ets, an assassin, the NSA, a stalker and attempted abduction; the film has Travis's missing girlfriend (he seems only mildly concerned), a belligerent Michael Ironside, and an NSO comrade alongside Ironside investigating the lab explosion and escaped animals.

The dog is strangely the most believable character overall; the retriever's soulful eyes seem full of exasperation at the film's meandering course and discordant tempo: the music is one moment a thriller, then a drama, then a wacky evade-and-chase. (I suspect accomplished composer Joel Goldsmith was only following orders). Still, on a decent number of forum boards and site comment sections (for at least the last decade) folks who love the Goldsmith score and have been begging various vinyl-industry heavies to give *Watchers* a proper release. Honestly, I'd buy it for the nostalgia factor alone.

Regrettably, Lala is not given much to do, She appears only for a barn make-out scene at the beginning, followed by a fight scene between her father and the OXCOM, then disappears for much of the running time only to return to scream a lot the end. She did help to influence a young Rhonda's fashion choices, however and I found this pleasant, personally hilarious memory returning with my recent viewing. '80s films were a positively endless pool of influence.



The Eyes of Officer Porter.

Haim & Co. do save the day, but it feels contrived, like everything needed to be wrapped up quickly so everyone could go home. The Koontz novel itself feels too long and convoluted. Furthermore, I know I'm not alone when I say there was some serious skimming in that recent re-read of 352 pages [5]; I became restless and my eyes wandered at the wordy exposition. I got to the end with lots of sighing.

I have come to believe that this film could be remade in exciting and imaginative ways – even in the middle of a pandemic – possibly *because* there is a recent pandemic: creepies escape from a lab, a deadly battle ensues, humans (and doggo) are victorious to save the day and mankind, then we update our social media about it! It could give us something to hope for. Something to long for. Something to dress for.

Additionally, while labeled sci-fi, the film version of *Watchers* also belongs in the campy man-in-a-monster-suit genre, which can be fun on its own with the right expectations, snacks, and companions. As far as '80s adaptations go, and as the first entry in a series, I've seen much worse than *Watchers* and can retain no ill will toward a film that was such a remarkable part of my formative years – and I know if/when the soundtrack is realized and released, I'll be one of the first fans online yapping about it.

Endnotes

THE OUTSIDERS (1983)

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- [2] "The Outsiders (Novel)," (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/z5h7ttz>
- [3] "The Outsiders' Stays Gold at 35: Inside Coppola's Crafty Methods and Stars' Crazy Pranks," (*Variety*, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/yyutq3uy>
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] "The Outsiders (film)," Wikipedia <https://tinyurl.com/yxtardo2>
- [6] "The Outsiders," (*RogerEbert.com*, 1983). <https://tinyurl.com/y2lbt32>
- [7] "Outsiders in for Re-release, DVD," (*Variety*, 2005) <https://tinyurl.com/yykvpqhq>
- [8] "The Outsiders' Stays Gold at 35: Inside Coppola's Crafty Methods and Stars' Crazy Pranks," (*Variety*, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/yyutq3uy>
- [9] "The Outsiders House Museum," (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/y3aj5e8t>
- [10] Ibid.

TO LIVE AND DIE IN L.A. (1985)

- [1] "Men Write Women" <https://twitter.com/menwritewomen>
- [2] "The unforgettable 'Kafkaesque' chase is the shining sequence of To Live and Die in L.A." (Hagerty Media, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/y4krreua>

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[4] "To Live and Die in L.A. (1985): Cult classic thriller is only the greatest film of the 1980s" (Wacko Jacko's Essential Viewing, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/y5qmtqg8>

[5] "Review: Friedkin Uncut" (*Rogerebert.com*, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/yxk6ek7y>

[6] "The city I live in, the city of angels" (*Alternate Ending*, 2011) <https://tinyurl.com/y5kkax58>

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[9] "To Live And Die In L.A.' Series From William Friedkin & Bobby Moresco In Works At WGN America" (*Deadline*, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/y3fwsx3j>

STAND BY ME (1986)

- [1] "Meathead` Rob Reiner Meets and Defeats His Longtime Demons" (Chicago Tribune, 1986) <https://tinyurl.com/y4wu9xur>
- [2] "Stand By Me (film)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/y6e5aejx>
- [3] "Stand by Me' Oral History: Rob Reiner

and Cast on River Phoenix and How Coming-of-Age Classic Almost Didn't Happen" (Variety, 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/y5aej42e>

[4] Ibid.

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[8] "Stand By Me (film)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/y6e5aejx>

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[11] Linn County, Oregon Parks and Recreation. <https://tinyurl.com/y3u74fsd>

84 CHARING CROSS ROAD (1987)

[1] "The Reality Behind '84 Charing Cross Road'" (*New York Times*, 1983) <https://tinyurl.com/y4hnszzo>

[2] "84, Charing Cross Road" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/y43byt5f>

[3] "84 Charing Cross Road (film)" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/y5tqgrm7>

[4] "Film 86 Location Report - 84 Charing Cross Road" (YouTube, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/y2q6vk96>

[5] "Helene Hanff" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/y6ynwary>

[6] "'84 Charing Cross Road' revisited" (The Telegraph, 2011) <https://tinyurl.com/yyn9fwaa>

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LESS THAN ZERO (1987)

[1] (After 35 years!) But ... $3+5 = 8$ and 8 represents infinity – a common synchronicity noted in the film at least twice: A) At Julian's attempted break-in, his father gives the code "13472" ($1+3+4+7+2 = 17 = 1+7 = 8$) and B) graffiti on the tunnel wall when Clay and Blair hit the coyote "1985, 5, and 7" appear and this is another 35 leading to 8. Less than Zero is, apparently, forever. None of this is as strange to me as the sheer volume of TVs all over the damn place in the film.

[2] It's also his first novel adapted to film. Others are *American Psycho* (2000), *The Rules of Attraction* (2002), and *The Informers* (2008).

[3] Written by author Douglas E. Winter and appearing in the horror anthology *The Living Dead* (2008). "I thought *Less Than Zero* was the first great zombie novel of the 1980s," Winter says in an online interview with me.

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY (1988)

[1] "Bright Lights, Big City (film)," (Wikipedia). <https://tinyurl.com/y2uel2w3>

[2] Ibid.

[3] "A Fired Woman Film Director--New Questions, Issue Continues," (Los Angeles Times, 1988). <https://tinyurl.com/y27zakwf>

[4] "Bright Lights, Big City (film)," (Wikipedia). <https://tinyurl.com/y2uel2w3>

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Bright Lights, Big City." (Roger Ebert, 1988) <https://tinyurl.com/yxmxubva>

[8] "Bright Lights, Big City (film)," (Wikipedia). <https://tinyurl.com/y2uel2w3>

[9] "Bright Lights, Big City (musical)," (Wikipedia). <https://tinyurl.com/yxujhecc>

THEY LIVE (1988)

[1] "John Carpenter is Scared" (*Esquire*, 2020), <https://tinyurl.com/y2l5bbku>

[2] Larry Cohen tackled the same concept in his 1985 horror satire, *The Stuff*. See *Girls, on Film* #4: The Food Issue. <https://tinyurl.com/yxjdm9q>

[3] "John Carpenter's 'They Live' Was Supposed to Be a Warning. We Didn't Heed It. We Didn't Even Understand It." (*The Ringer*, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/y2l27ove>

Bonus: Rob Ager (of Collative Learning) argues that the enslaving aliens of *They Live* are also subject to enslavement. "THEY LIVE who is more enslaved?" (YouTube, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/y342wpke>

[4] Ibid.

[5] "The SFFaudio Podcast #146 – AUDIOBOOK/READALONG – Eight O'Clock In The Morning by Ray Nelson" (*SFFAudio*, 2012) <https://tinyurl.com/y3pt4lqo>

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Nada" (SAP Comics, 2012) <https://tinyurl.com/y3tlc6dg>

[8] "21 Mind-Altering Facts You Never Knew About John Carpenter's They Live" (*'80s Kids*) <https://tinyurl.com/y32d8l3z>

[9] "They Live" (Wikipedia) <https://tinyurl.com/oey5kje>

[10] "Matt Reeves To Direct Sci-Fi Film Based On Short Story '8 O'Clock In The Morning'" (*IndieWire*, 2011) <https://tinyurl.com/y4fba8nt>

WATCHERS (1988)

[1] My infatuation with the Coreys's film career abruptly ended, save for a few soundtrack selections and sexcapades *Blown Away* (1993).

[2] Billed as Lala in *Watchers*, aka Lala Zappa and Lala Sloatman, a former model best known for an appearance in *Pump Up the Volume* (1990) and *Dream a Little Dream* (1989). In both films, her wardrobe was more memorable than her character.

[3] Haim's IMDB also notes in his early roles the that fact his mouth is almost always open AND that his performance in *Watchers* seems to be suffering from some sort of 'audience effect': overly exaggerated dialogue delivery with movements equally so. "Corey Haim" (IMDB) <https://tinyurl.com/uld7pyt>

[4] Haim would really try to battle his troubles and I appreciated his attempts (alongside Feldman) at the recorded 900 number cash grab to explain and apologize to fans, as well as bond with them.

[5] All sequels have particularly nasty reviews, but *Watchers 2* (1990) follows the Koontz novel better than the original film; *Watchers 3* (1994) continues the military/beast caper in a S. American jungle; and *Watchers Reborn* is déjà vu BUT stars the lovely Lisa Wilcox (*A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988)).

Girls, on Film

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