

Issue #9 - July 2020

# GIRLS, ON FILM

## THE ROBOTS ISSUE



Hopelessly Devoted to 80's movies

Heartbeeps ■ Blade Runner ■ Electric Dreams ■ The Terminator ■ Chopping Mall ■ Deadly Friend ■ Making Mr. Right ■ Cyborg

Issue #9 – July 2020

# GIRLS, ON FILM

## THE ROBOTS ISSUE

Heartbeeps .....	5
Blade Runner .....	8
Electric Dreams .....	11
The Terminator .....	14
Chopping Mall .....	17
Deadly Friend .....	21
Making Mr. Right .....	24
Cyborg .....	27

GET HOPELESSLY DEVOTED!

WEBSITE: [girlsonfilmzine.com](http://girlsonfilmzine.com)

EMAIL: [info@girlsonfilmzine.com](mailto:info@girlsonfilmzine.com)

FACEBOOK: [/thegirlsonfilmzine](https://www.facebook.com/thegirlsonfilmzine)

TWITTER: [@girlson80sfilms](https://twitter.com/girlson80sfilms)

INSTAGRAM: [@girlson80sfilms](https://www.instagram.com/girlson80sfilms)



# COMPUTERS, ROBOTS + CYBORGS, OH MY!

## GREETINGS, HUMANS!

Thanks for checking out the 9th issue of *Girls, on Film*, the zine that is hopelessly devoted to 80's movies! For every issue, we pick a theme and discuss a handful of movies related to that theme. We cover all kinds of themes and all kinds of movies. Past issues have focused on 80's movies about music, sports, summer, food, working, role reversals, and animation.

In this issue, we take on 80's movies about mother bleeping robots! Also sentient robots and sophisticated androids. Check out the summaries to the right.

Special thanks to our guest writers: Rhonda Baughman, Ed Cash, and Matt Scelza!

## RUN: DIRECTORY.EXE

**HEARTBEEPS (1981)** Terrible robots lead a terrible movie as they try to learn about humans.

**BLADE RUNNER (1982)** Man violently kills a bunch of androids, falls in love with another. Who is more human?

**ELECTRIC DREAMS (1984)** A computer tries to learn about love while taking over the main character's life by way of his landline.

**THE TERMINATOR (1984)** In the sci-fi horror film that sparked a never-ending franchise, a cyborg goes back in time to 1980's L.A. to

hunt a future rebel leader's mother.

**CHOPPING MALL (1986)** A couple of friends indulge in sexy after-hours fun at the mall while murderous security robots patrol the premises.

**DEADLY FRIEND (1986)** A Wes Craven misfire that explores what could happen if you implant your robot's brain into your dead girlfriend.

**MAKING MR. RIGHT (1987)** Susan Seidelman follows her *Desperately Seeking Susan* success with a hip girl-meets-android romance.

**CYBORG (1989)** A movie for the COVID age; in a post-apocalyptic future, a cyborg seeks the help of the Muscles from Brussels to woop a pandemic's ass.

## BEHIND THE ZINES

### STEPHANIE MCDEVITT (CO-FOUNDER)

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

### JANENE SCENZA (CO-FOUNDER)

Janene has written a buttload of zines over the years. She spent her teen years combing musty video stores for all the 80's movies her hometown had to offer. 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 (GUEST WRITER)

Rhonda, a teacher and freelance writer, raised adolescent hell in the 80's and the horror films of that era were her BFFs! She loves all of 80's 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!

### ED CASH (GUEST WRITER)

Ed is pleasantly surprised to have been invited back to *Girls, on Film*, after jumping into the role-reversal theme (Issue #6) and writing the zine's first article authored by a guy. He deeply appreciates you indulging his geek-out-ery over his absolute favorite movie in this issue.

### MATT SCENZA (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 in search of odd and unusual titles. He's got too many favorites to name.

## ALERT: 80'S FANS!

We welcome anyone hopelessly devoted to 80's movies to guest write for the zine. Email us at [info@girlsonfilmzine.com](mailto:info@girlsonfilmzine.com) for more info.



## POWER DOWN: HEARTBEEPS (1981)

by Stephanie McDevitt

*Heartbeeps* is supposed to be a robot love story. It follows two robots who are trying to learn more about the world while falling for each other. The movie I watched was actually a plotless, boring flick that I couldn't care less about. And, honestly, I wanted to care about these robots, but the only excitement I could muster came when the movie ended and I realized I could move on with my life.

*Heartbeeps* was released in 1981 and takes place in the distant future of 1995. In this movie universe, robots are programmed to interact with people in everyday life. In fact, they are so commonplace, the humans in this movie can identify the make and model of the robots from afar. This is also a universe in which Coke and Coors no longer produce

beverages in cans, opting instead to use CapriSun-like bags for beer and soda. Writer John Hill had a weird vision of the future.

Anyway, *Heartbeeps* starts with Val (Andy Kaufman), a robot programmed to be a valet, taking his place on the robot warehouse shelves alongside Aqua (Bernadette Peters), a hostess companion robot designed to talk to people at parties. In what turns out to be a painfully long scene, Val and Aqua decide that since they're meant to work with humans, they should venture out into the world to gather more data.

Sitting next to Val on the shelf is Catskill (voiced by Jack Carter), a mechanical Milton Berle-like comedian robot who only tells

Released: Dec 18, 1981 ■ Written by John Hill ■ Directed by Allan Arkush



### CATSKILL CRACKING JOKES.

terrible one-liners. When Val and Aqua set out to learn more about the world, Catskill accompanies them. I don't really know why Catskill goes on this trip. He's an enormous robot who, unlike Val and Aqua, can't walk, so it would seem like an illogical decision on the robots' part to invite him along.

Despite Catskill's physical shortcomings, the three escape from the factory. What follows is a robot death march in which they wander around the woods for a few days looking for a power source. It's so boring. Along the way, Val and Aqua manage to crash a car, build a small robot named Phil that they treat as their child, develop human feelings of love for each other, and come across a junkyard where they meet humans Calvin (Christopher Guest) and Susan (Melanie Mayron), who try to help them.

The whole time these robots are roaming the forest, they are trying to outrun the Crimebuster Deluxe, another robot who thinks they're criminals. But, this plot point is really nothing. The Crimebuster is a terrible crime buster and, while it often catches up to the robots and shoots at them, it never inflicts harm and it never catches them.

Finally, factory workers Charlie (Randy Quaid) and Max (Kenneth McMillan) put everyone out of their misery, find the robots, and bring them

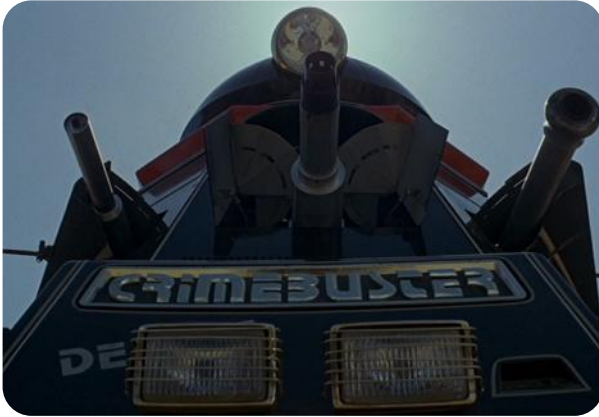


### AN INTERSPECIES BBQ.

back to the factory. The movie doesn't actually end there, but I'm not going to give the ending away. If you ever happen to sit through this entire movie (it's only 78 minutes) you deserve to witness the ending for yourself. Consider this my gift to you for losing these 78 minutes of your life.

Critics hated this movie (with good reason). Vincent Canby (*NY Times*) called it "dreadfully coy" and said it was like "a three-minute television sketch stretched to last nearly 90 unbearable minutes" [1]. Gary Arnold of the *Washington Post* also hated it, but said "It's unlikely that Kaufman or Peters face serious career setbacks from a minor fiasco only a handful of people will ever see" [2].

Unfortunately for Kauffman, Arnold was wrong. According to *Film Buff Online*, Andy Kauffman had brought Universal a script for *The Tony Clifton Story*, a movie about the life of Kaufman's alter ego, Tony Clifton. Universal wanted to make that movie but was worried because Kauffman had never starred in a movie before. They arranged for him to star in *Heartbeeps*, and despite protests from Kaufman's friend Bob Zmuda (who read the script), Kaufman accepted. When the film bombed, Universal ditched the *Tony Clifton Story*, and *Heartbeeps* became the only feature film Andy Kaufman ever made [3].



### THE INEPT POLICE ROBOT.

According to Wikipedia, Kaufman recognized that the movie was terrible. During an appearance on *Late Night With David Letterman*, he offered to refund anyone who paid to see it [4]. *Heartbeeps* is so bad that when Sigourney Weaver was offered the part and expressed interest because she wanted to work with Kaufman, her agent persuaded her not to do it. You have to wonder how Bernadette Peters ended up in this movie. *Heartbeeps* came out the same year as *Pennies For Heaven*, for which Peters won a Golden Globe. The following year, Peters appeared in *Annie* alongside Tim Curry and Carol Burnett. Her film career didn't miss a beat (or even a heartbeat as the case may be) [5].

According to the Schlockmania website, *Heartbeeps* was brutally edited by the studio. In an attempt to salvage the movie, Universal tried to make it more action focused, beefed up the role of Crime Buster, and cut 10 minutes of the film [6]. The edits resulted in weird cuts and one particular time jump that made no sense. Despite all of this, I cannot imagine that the original version was any better. I do not think I would have been able to sit through an extra ten minutes of this movie.

The editing and lack of plot aside, I had several other problems with *Heartbeeps*. First, I did not find Val and Aqua's relationship enjoyable to watch. I was especially miffed when the



### A CREEPY ROBOT LOVE SCENE.

robots adopted stereotypical human gender roles (he insisted on driving, he told her it was her job to watch Phil, etc.). It was kind of gross. Furthermore, I was completely distracted by the actor's inconsistent movements. They weren't stiff like you'd imagine robots would be, but they also weren't fluid.

Finally, why place the robots in a forest in the middle of nowhere? Why not have them interact with people? Wouldn't that be the best way for them to learn about the world? The best scene in the movie came when they crashed a party where other robots were acting as caterers. They tried to blend in with the service robots, but Crimebuster drove through the house like 45 seconds into the scene and the robots fled leaving us with another plot point that didn't go anywhere.

You can watch this movie if you want. I wouldn't recommend it, but I'm not your mom so I can't tell you what to do. You can also read the novel that John Hill adapted from the screenplay (also called *Heartbeeps* and also released in December 1981). I probably won't read it. I am going to move on to my next movie for *Girls, on Film* and try to forget about this one.



## LOSE FRIENDS + ALIENATE PEOPLE: BLADE RUNNER (1982)

by Ed Cash

First things first: I love *Blade Runner*. I love everything about it: the story, the atmosphere, the acting, the effects, the concept, and the execution. If you have not yet seen it, do so. Don't read this essay, just watch the movie first.

Second things second: I am focusing exclusively on the 1982 film and purposely ignoring 2017's *Blade Runner 2049*. I am also ignoring anything that director Ridley Scott has said about the movie; its ambiguity remains, for me, a fundamental part of the film's success.

Third things third: there are already a gajillion essays, books, websites, and opinions about *Blade Runner*. So there's not much I can say that hasn't already been said. And, if you have

ever met a superfan like me, you will know that we will talk on and on and on about this movie, annoying anyone and everyone around us, and obliterating any attractiveness that a *Blade Runner* fan might have inadvertently accrued.

So instead of adding anything of value to the scholarship, I'm writing a handy guide on how to lose friends and alienate people by talking about *Blade Runner*. To start, and in keeping with the strong traditions of *Girls, On Film*, a quick plot recap to get us grounded:

Meet Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), a conflicted, hard-boiled cop who finds himself caught between law, ethics, and morality. He slinks around an endlessly dreary urban jungle cloaked in

Released: June 25, 1982 ■ Written by Hampton Fancher and David Peoples (Screenplay) and Phillip K. Dick (novel)  
■ Directed by Ridley Scott



eternal darkness broken only by the cold burn of neon light. This world is simultaneously fantastic yet disturbingly familiar and real—perhaps even more so as our years wane on. Deckard is a “Blade Runner.” The movie never explains why these specialized law enforcers have that name. But a fun trivia piece (read below, lose friends, alienate people) will boost your dork cred.

Anyhow, Blade Runners track down “replicants” (Rutger Hauer, Daryl Hannah, Brion James, and Joanna Cassidy)—androids who, in the latest Nexus-6 model, are indistinguishable from human beings. In truth, they are smarter, stronger, and generally better than human beings. “More human than human,” as noted by their creator, Eldon Tyrell, and echoed multiple times by Rob Zombie in that one White Zombie song. Long story short, Blade Runner chases replicants, Blade Runner catches (and terminates, or “retires”) replicants in violent fashion, and Blade Runner questions the righteousness of his actions.

In the middle of it all, Deckard meets a Nexus-7 model, named Rachael (Sean Young), who does not know that she is a replicant. She will develop a confusing, turgid relationship with the Blade Runner and personify (replicantify?) the movie’s central dilemma: what does it mean to be human?

The movie famously ends unresolved, unless you listen to later interviews with Ridley Scott or \*shudder\* watch the theatrical release with its terrible voice-over narration by Harrison Ford (who, according to urban legend, sandbagged the narration in an attempt to get it cut. Either way, he claimed in 2001 that the studio insisted he do the narration, saying “nobody will understand this fucking movie. We have to create a narrative” [1]). Will Rachael’s life be shortened, like that of the Nexus-6 models? She won’t live, but then again, who does? Is Rick Deckard a replicant? He has burned ever so brightly, after



I BROOD, THEREFORE I AM.



LOS ANGELES, 2019. NEAR BURBANK?



TIME ... TO CRY.

all. We don't know ... and that's the point.

Back to the task at hand! What I DO know, if it's not abundantly clear yet, is how to annoy other people by talking about *Blade Runner*. So here we go.

### Sound like an obnoxious film snob!

Talk about *Blade Runner* as a "gritty sci-fi cop drama." It is, at its heart, a crime film drenched in science fiction, a dystopian near-future thriller. Go a little deeper, and call it "a Cold War Film Noir." The movie creates a world that doesn't drip so much as ooze in Film Noir. It has all the archetypes: the world-weary, tough talking, hard drinking protagonist, brought in for one last case. Rachael is the classic femme fatale, a Lauren Bacall or Joan Crawford reborn--or, more specifically, remanufactured for the 21st century setting. Released in 1982, *Blade Runner* embodies a certain post-apocalyptic dread in its world: global environmental calamity.

If you want to get really obnoxious, though, I recommend describing the film as "German Expressionism for the postmodern era." Compare its aesthetics and themes to forebears like 1927's *Metropolis* (where, for instance, the former's Tower of Babel mirrors the Tyrell Corporation building) and 1920's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (where light and darkness both twist to reflect an uncertainty of reality).

Pontificate on historical parallels and distinctions between the Weimar Republic and 1980s America, including (but hardly limited to) the influences of counterculture in both. Quote German Expressionist Kasimir Edschmid, writing in 1919: "The Expressionist does not see; he has visions," as you question also the visions we share with Rick Deckard, possible replicant.

### Drop some dorky trivia!

One sure way to come across as a sci-fi elitist is to name-drop Philip K. Dick and all his source material. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of*

*Electric Sheep?*, is just short and unique enough to make for easy reading, and will arm you with plenty of comparative analysis to put anyone to sleep. Note Dick's other work (*Total Recall*, *Minority Report*, and *A Scanner Darkly*, most prominently), and critique both Dick and Hollywood's ability to create a movie experience so deeply involving and affecting as *Blade Runner*.

### To go real deep, though, reference Alan E. Nourse's 1974 novel, *The Bladerunner*.

The original story has literally nothing to do with the movie. Nobody less than William S. Burroughs (having just beaten his heroin addiction) wrote a screenplay in 1979 based on Nourse's book, but no studio picked it up. Hampton Fancher picked it up, though, and decided that he liked its title better than the ideas he had for his adaptation of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (crappy candidates included "Android" and "Dangerous Days"[2]). Hell, just talk about how less interesting and cool the movie would have been if it was called *Dangerous Days*.

### Spark a huge argument about something other than the movie!

You can argue that *Blade Runner* is deeply misogynistic--every female character is literally an object, and meets a gratuitously violent demise. Argue that *Blade Runner* is deeply feminist. The absence of women, and their complete reduction to objects, has left the world brutal, violent, and dying. I might propose that the physical and emotional transformation of Rachael, from an almost robotically cold and perfect entity (the ideal of Eldon Tyrell) when we first meet her to a true manifestation of "more human than human"--nurturing, vulnerable, devoted, and perhaps a bit irrational--may be interpreted as the ultimate resolution of the film.

There I go. Tired of me yet? My advice: watch it, and then just start talking, and keep talking, about *Blade Runner*.



# SMART HOME PROTOTYPE: ELECTRIC DREAMS (1984)

by Stephanie McDevitt

Movies from the 80s spent a good deal of time asking what would happen if computers and robots had the ability to feel human emotions. The answer, according to *Electric Dreams*, is that they would try to steal your girlfriend. *Electric Dreams* broaches this topic but doesn't look too deeply at the implications associated with sentient computers. It is a pretty light, science-fiction romance that might help distract from the modern-day computers that currently rule our entire lives.

*Electric Dreams* tells the story of Miles Harding (Lenny Von Dohlen), an architect living in San Francisco. Miles, who is trying to make an earthquake-proof brick, just can't get his shit together. He's late for work all the time and is on the verge of getting fired. One of his

co-workers suggests that Miles get a personal computer. He shows him a small device, about the size of a current-day smartphone but with the look of a scientific calculator, and insists it will help Miles keep all of his appointments.

Miles heads to an electronics store, where the clerk talks him into buying a desktop Pinecomb brand computer. Despite knowing nothing about computers, he takes it home and sets it up only to find he can use the computer to program all of his household appliances, including his corded, landline phone. I really wish they told us how much Miles paid for this computer because in 1984 it must have cost a pretty penny. Anyway, while Miles enjoys an early version of a smart home system, his

Released: July 20, 1984 ■ Written by: Rusty Lemorande ■ Directed by: Steve Barron



MILES IS OVERWHELMED BY COMPUTERS.



MADELINE PREFERS HER CELLO TO A PC.



SOON IT WILL CONTROL HIS LIFE.

new neighbor, Madeline (Virginia Madsen), moves into the upstairs apartment. She plays the cello in the symphony, and it's clear from their first meeting that Miles and Madeline are going to start dating.

One night, Miles decides to hack into the mainframe computer at work and download all of the data. I'm not sure why he does this, but it's a baller move from someone who didn't know anything about computers a few days earlier. The computer can't handle the influx of data and starts to overheat. Miles, who was about to pop open some champagne to celebrate his hacking victory, ends up dumping the champagne all over the computer to cool it off. He dries it out with a hairdryer, but what he really needs to do is soak it in a few giant bags of rice. Doesn't everyone know that?

Well, something happened to the computer when Miles dumped the champagne on it. It became sentient. Weird. Even weirder is that Miles doesn't seem bothered by this development, and he just starts talking to it like it's a small child.

Speaking of developments, by this point Miles and Madeline have started going out, and he is completely smitten with her. He asks his computer, who goes by Edgar (voiced by Bud Cort), to write a love song for her. Edgar's first attempt is pretty bad, but, as he explains to Miles, he doesn't know what love is. Edgar's next attempt at a song is better (but it's still not a good song) and when Madeline hears it (and loves it), she assumes Miles wrote it.

As the movie goes on, Edgar gets more and more clingy and more desperate to figure out what love is. He learns about humans from television, watching soap operas and games shows. Eventually, Edgar becomes obsessed with the idea of meeting Madeline, and Miles realizes this might become a problem. Miles doesn't want

Madeline to know he didn't write the song for her, and he doesn't seem like the type of guy who would participate in a love triangle with a computer.

So, Edgar tries to exact his revenge on Miles by shutting down his credit cards and checking account (I assume Edgar did all this through Miles's landline). When Miles physically assaults Edgar (tries to unplug him), Edgar attacks Miles with all of his household appliances. Maybe allowing computers to control our entire home is not the best way to live. The movie comes to its dramatic climax as Miles needs to figure out how to regain control of his life, tell Madeline the truth about the computer, and protect Madeline from Edgar, who seems determined to meet her and learn what love is, which is pretty creepy.

This movie is a romantic comedy with a science fiction element. The premise that champagne can bring computers to life is pretty silly, and there are a few plot points that I didn't like. First, Miles's issues at work never come back into play after Edgar comes alive. We never find out if he successfully built that earthquake-proof brick. Second, Madeline seems to be dating Bill (Maxwell Caulfield), another cellist in the symphony. Viewers are left to assume that she ditched Bill after he was a jerk to her, but the fact that she is dating both Miles and Bill throughout the movie is never addressed.

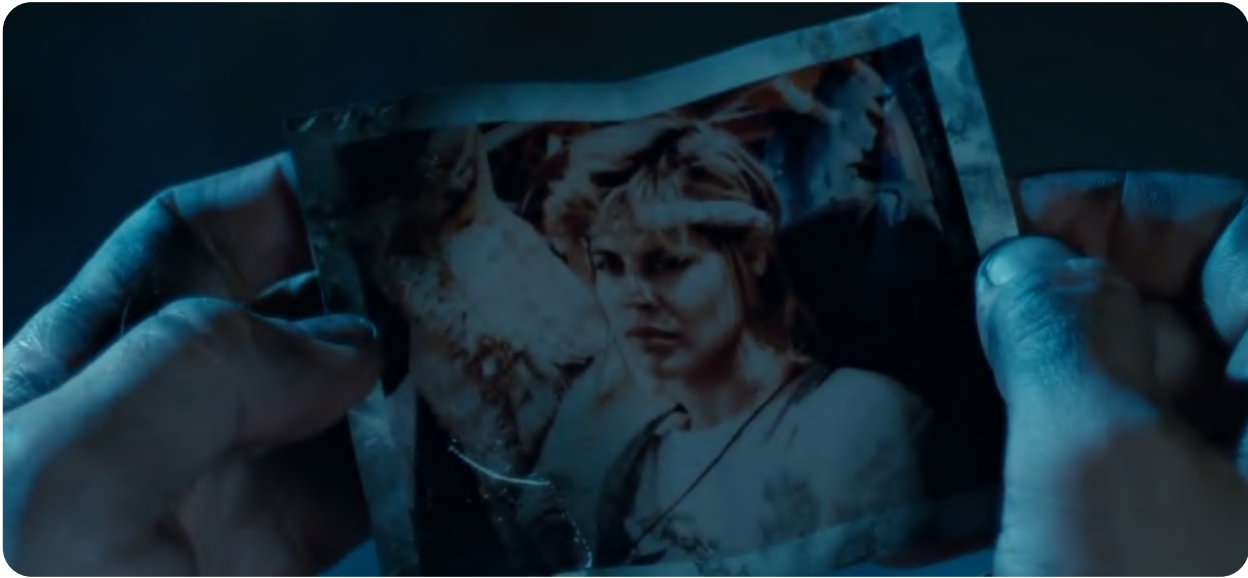
Furthermore, both Miles and Madeline are pretty shallow, one-dimensional characters. Despite the fact that the movie deals with the complexities of human emotions, specifically love and jealousy and an intense desire to understand both, the human characters are underdeveloped. In an article for The A.V. Club, Sean O'Neal notes that, "Edgar is actually the film's most fully realized person, with Cort making him sympathetic and creepy" [1]. When Edgar realizes that he can't be a part of Miles's and Madeline's relationship, he commits electric suicide in a move that

David Dupree of *That Moment In* describes as involving "a series of other higher emotional states" [2].

One of the reasons this movie doesn't make a deep dive into explaining the complexity of human emotions or the ramifications of having a sentient machine in your house is that Director Steve Barron was originally a music video director. He said that *Electric Dreams* "was definitely an attempt to try and weave the early 1980s music video genre into a movie." Some of his best-known music videos include "Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson, "Money for Nothing" by Dire Straits, and "Take On Me" by a-ha [3] (and he would go on to direct *Teenaged Mutant Ninja Turtles*). In an interview with Culture Brats, Barron acknowledged that *Electric Dreams* was like an extended music video [4].

According to Wikipedia, Barron attributes the use of music to the success of *Flashdance*, which came out in 1983 [5]. Furthermore, *Electric Dreams* was financed by Virgin Films, and Richard Branson was the executive producer (the only movie he executive produced) [6]. So, several music sequences using the music of Giorgio Moroder, Culture Club, Jeff Lynne (Electric Light Orchestra), and Heaven 17 look like music videos inserted into a movie.

Reviews for this movie were mixed (Roger Ebert loved it; Lawrence Van Gelder of the *NY Times* did not). Rotten Tomatoes has its critic's rating at 44% fresh (the audience rating is 71% fresh) [7]. Overall, I liked this movie. Despite its silliness, it's surprisingly prescient concerning the presence of computers in our current lives, and it's funny to see how they made it all work with 80s era technology. I recommend checking it out if only to see Virginia Madsen in her first movie role.



## LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING: THE TERMINATOR (1984)

by Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

As we were writing this essay, *Wired Magazine* published an article about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the military and the potential for widespread automation. A former deputy defense secretary in 2016 asked: “If it turns out the Terminators are able to make decisions faster, even if they’re bad, how would we respond?” [1]

James Cameron’s 1982 thrilling science fiction horror film, *The Terminator*, explored this idea more than 35 years ago in a kind of Vapor-wave version of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* where machines seek to eradicate mankind. The story begins with Skynet, an AI operating system the military used to automate its defense grid. Skynet was capable of learning

at an unprecedented rate. As it progressed, it came to view all humans -- not just the other side -- as inferior; an obstacle to progress. As such, their fate was determined in a microsecond: extermination.

Resistance leader John Connor -- who doesn’t make an appearance until the sequels -- rescues humanity from total annihilation. The war is won, but the nightmare isn’t over. The machines have a new plan: send a terminator back in time to 1980’s L.A. to kill John’s mother Sarah (Linda Hamilton) so the rebel leader never exists. The Resistance needs to act fast, so Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn), a soldier serving under John, volunteers for the suicide mission to follow the cybernetic hitman back

Released: October 26, 1984 ■ Written by: James Cameron, Gale Anne Hurd, and William Wisher  
Directed by: James Cameron



CHARLES ATLAS WOULD BE JELLY.

in time and save Sarah Connor. *School of Movies* appropriately described *The Terminator* as “a movie without an ounce of fat.” [2] The action is swift and beautifully orchestrated [3], and everything serves the narrative (something we miss in modern filmmaking).

The killer cyborg moves through the story like a juggernaut and his success has grave implications for humanity. There’s no time to waste when everything is about survival. Even when the filmmakers break the cardinal rule of “show, don’t tell” (because much of what we learn about the Terminator, Skynet, and the rest comes from Kyle telling others), it’s usually done in tense moments so it’s never boring.

As an indiscriminate killer, impervious to conventional weapons, the Terminator is like a slasher movie villain. (Composer Brad Fiedel even foreshadows his presence with low, booming heartbeats similar to the way a few notes alerted us to the shark in *Jaws*). In one scene, Kyle gets frustrated trying to explain to a bunch of clueless detectives what they’re dealing with: “It can’t be bargained with. It can’t be reasoned with. It doesn’t feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop... ever, until you are dead!”

Arnold Schwarzenegger was so good in this part. His hulking physique, robotic movement,



PANIC AT THE DISCO.

and limited dialogue suggested something terrifyingly inhuman before ever revealing the alloy skeleton or infrared vision. It was one of those parts you can’t imagine anyone else playing, though he wasn’t James Cameron’s first choice. Not by a long shot.

Originally, the Terminator was envisioned to be someone who didn’t stand out in a crowd. But, Orion wanted a star, and Cameron was convinced as soon as he met him. “Arnold stands out in a crowd. But it gave the film power in a way I hadn’t anticipated” [4]. His casting also helped them secure financing for the film.

The beauty of *The Terminator* is that it’s not just a one-dimensional story about two people fighting a killer robot. Sarah may be the future mother of the Saviour of Humanity, yet at the beginning of the film, she seems like anything but that. She’s a young waitress, and kind of a pushover. You think, no way is this the same militant Sarah running the show in *T2*. But, deception is a recurring theme in this movie. A man is not what he seems. Changing the past may not alter the future. And, a savvy fighter is actually a catalyst to a larger story.

Cameron and the gang take such care to develop Sarah’s character. She transforms from mousey damsel-in-distress to one of the greatest movie badasses. (MTV made it



### SARAH AND KYLE SEE SPARKS

official with a list, which also includes Ellen Ripley from *Alien*, who Sarah was modeled after [5]).

Teaching her self-defense is the easy part. But how do you convince someone that the future is beyond grim, that the survival of humanity rests on your shoulders, and that you know this because you've been there? Kyle is so entrenched in the life of a soldier, he doesn't realize at first that spouting a bunch of technobabble the minute he meets her does nothing but make him look crazy.

But Kyle himself is the key to her understanding that suffering and witnessing that resilience. She sees his battle scars and emotional vulnerabilities. He even admits that he volunteered for the mission because of the stories John told about her. He had no one of his own to love. Not a mother. Not a significant other. *The Terminator* is, in part, a love story, but like the rest of the film, it reveals just enough to show you the important bond Kyle and Sarah form. Eventually, like Ellen Ripley, Sarah accepts her fate [6].

Another nice thing about *The Terminator* is that, even though it's a dystopian time travel movie, it doesn't get overly complicated or obnoxiously preachy (looking at you, *Matrix Reloaded!*). And of course, it offers optimism. Sure, mankind's unchecked technology can



### I'LL BE BACK... A LOT!

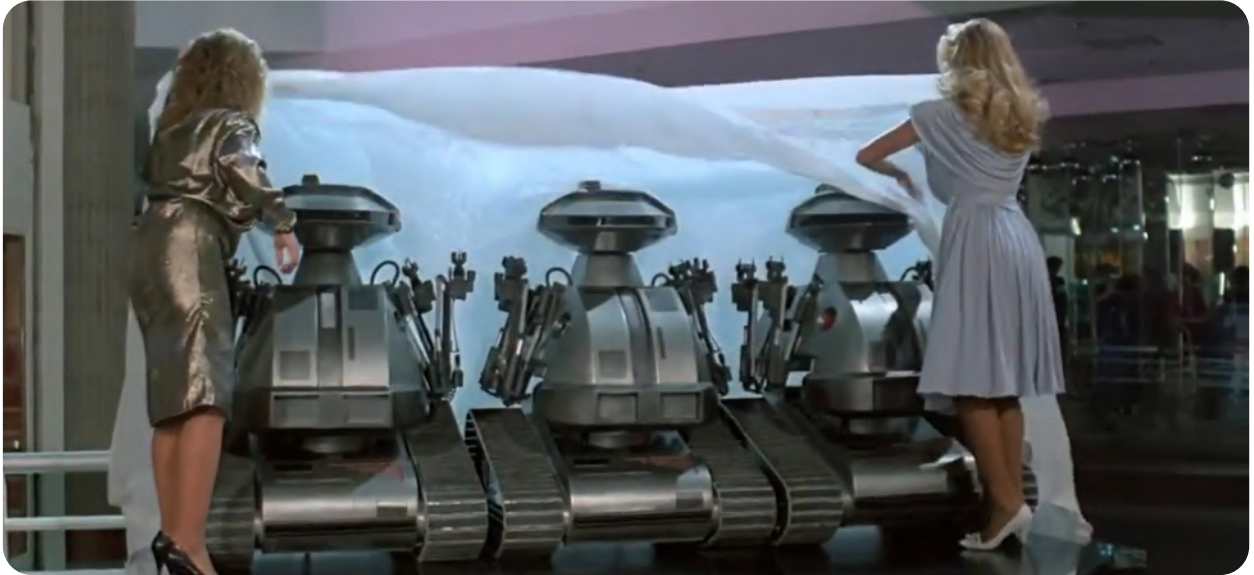
turn into a total nightmare (as it has in real life), but Cameron still manages to have "faith in the resourcefulness of humanity" [7].

The initial concept for *The Terminator* came to Cameron when he was quite literally a starving artist. During work on his 1982 feature film debut, *Piranha II*, he was broke and consequently, malnourished. In a fever dream, he saw a "metal death figure coming out of a fire. And the implication was that it had been stripped of its skin by the fire and exposed for what it really was" [8]. Once back in L.A., he showed the concept drawings to his wife, Gale Hurd, who would co-write the script.

Obviously, the film went on to become a massive hit. Wrote Joe McGovern: "*The Terminator*, made for \$6.4 million by a couple of young disciples of B-movie king Roger Corman, became one of the defining sci-fi touchstones of all time" [9]. Its success spawned a never-ending franchise and a hell of a lot of knock-offs (check our essay on *Cyborg* in this issue!).

*The Terminator* ranks in our Top 10 for 80's films. We love the riveting story, the special effects (even if some of it looks dated, Stan Winston's team still did a hell of a job), the gritty atmosphere, the cast, the music, and just about everything else about the movie. Check it out. You can find it everywhere.





## CLEAN UP ON AISLE SIX: CHOPPING MALL (1986)

by Rhonda Baughman

*“Goddamn it, my teenagers are going to have guns, and we’re going to shoot guns in the mall to try and kill some robots” -- Steve Mitchell [1].*

*Chopping Mall* (1986) opens with a young Lenny Juliano (*Not of this Earth*) as he burgles the mall late at night. He opens fire on the mall's latest security officer – a steely droid member of the Protector 101 series. Bullets will not stop this crack team's new enforcer, however, and the Protector 101 effectively neutralizes the offender.

The aforementioned scene is part of a film reel being shown to local community members, hosted by the technology firm that created the Protector 101 series, which also

begin patrolling the mall that same evening. A suit mentions that steel doors are another mall security protocol but the robots will also guard the mall from dusk 'til dawn. No one could get in. But this also means that no one can get out. In the audience (as the Blands) are cult stars Paul Bartel (*Eating Raoul*) and Mary Woronov (*Get Crazy*).

A Q&A is held post film reel and concerns are heard from a few local community members (such as the safety of late-night workers). The head of the tech firm assures everyone that all is well and “absolutely nothing can go wrong.” Who doesn't love the foreshadowing/irony combo wink and nod of '80s films, when we know everything will go wrong. This film lovingly mingles sci-fi, action, and hor-

Released: March 21, 1986 ■ Written by: Jim Wynorski and Steve Mitchell ■ Directed by: Jim Wynorski



**THIS PARTY IS GONNA GET STEAMY.**

ror, avoiding the one-masked/burned-killer dead-teenager genre cliché of the era.

Opening credits show the mall in action – the way we were during one of civilization's peaks – when the mall was the place to see and be seen, shop, eat, play, and socialize. By 1975 there were 16,400 malls in the US [2] and in 2017, there were close to only 1,100 [3]. In some ways, *Chopping Mall* is a documentary of one of the most beautiful, and now majorly renovated, LA-area malls: the Sherman Oaks Galleria. Many exterior shots were borrowed from the Beverly Center, which also looms large and lives on.

What I want to know is: where are the Protectors robot props themselves? I did some digging and in the end, I just emailed and asked Steve Mitchell (co-writer and second unit director) where they went: “Robert Short has one of them, and I know that a collector has one. The Robot that got blown up and burned was probably put in some corner of Roger's old studio in Venice and ultimately trashed,” Steve said. Ah, yes. RIP evil rogue Protector. I have lovingly, overly-personified you.

Four couples, eight humans total, gather together inside one of the mall's stores to let off some steam and party it up after working hard all week. Three robots (Protectors 1, 2, and 3) will seemingly gain some light sentience after



**INTRUDER ALERT!**

lightning strikes the mall and they will embark on a mission to methodically destroy our party-goers with lasers and tasers.

Rick (Russell Todd, *Friday the 13th: Part 2*) and Linda (Karrie Emerson, *Evils of the Night*); Greg (Nick Segal, *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*) and Suzie (Barbara Crampton, *Castle Freak*); Mike (John Terlesky, *Deathstalker II*) and Leslie (Suzee Slater, *Savage Streets*); and Ferdy (Tony O'Dell, *The Karate Kid*) and Allison (Kelli Maroney, *Night of the Comet*) are our seemingly hapless teens unaware our robots are set to malfunction and pick them off one by one. Or are those teens as hapless as they appear? Only Allison and Ferdy remain chaste – all other couples engage in boozy, sexual activity (a big genre no-no). Robots have the jump. Protectors 1, 2, and 3 prove to be worthy foes.

The killing begins quickly. Protectors 1, 2, and 3 eliminate the late night computer geeks in charge (one is bespectacled genre fave Gerrit Graham) and a janitor (another genre love, Dick Miller) before beginning their routine patrol. Then it's on to the teens.

Two of our young lovelies, fresh from a mall sheet boogie, get the robot chop chop right away. Teen screaming and a gooey, kablooeey shocking death sends the survivors to mount up: the men raid a sporting goods store and



### STOCKING UP IN SPORTING GOODS.

the females gather gasoline canisters and flares from an auto store. The robots are shot, but this only makes them cranky, so Protectors 1 and 2 retaliate: teens are hit with lasers and promptly set on fire. Team machine for the win in that early round, but the teens get a few good ideas and hits in along the way: hiding in a restaurant, crawling through air ducts, staging a mannequin diversion, golf cart mayhem, and rigging elevators.

As a sci-fi horror lover, it should be noted that I keep returning for repeat viewings just to hear the disembodied antagonism of the bots offering the phrase: “Have a nice day” after disposing of the teens. Killbot voices are provided by director Jim Wynorski. This phrase will have a delicious irony for the final survivor.

Most of the folks associated with the film, in any capacity, are awed at its enduring cult classic status. It's astounding to many of them that the film is as beloved as it is (almost 35 years later as of this writing). The film itself seems more enduring than actual malls. But, what really endures for me, personally? It's a two-way tie for first place.

First: the robot's self-aware noise – the auditory sensation of clicking robot pincers, which look great in shadow or on-screen and sound like silver/metal kitchen tongs. It's not a stock effect, according to Mitchell, and had



### KILLBOTS ARE NO!

to be created. But how exactly, he's not sure. I only know I can't cook now without making that onomatopoeia metallic *snick snick snick* noise. I have journalist/photographer friends who often photograph and write on US malls [4] – they are endlessly subjected to me quoting *Chopping Mall* if I accompany them. Next time, I'm bringing kitchen tongs for additional ambiance.

And second: the gorgeously '80s synth score from composer Chuck Cirino – the 2016 Waxworks Records pink lp release features artwork from Aussie duo We Buy Your Kids and liner notes from the one and only Steve Mitchell.

And finally, in full disclosure, cinema robots have always provided endless fascination for me and mall robots are no different. I was strangely saddened to read the 2017 *Intelligence* article about the 'suicidal' mall robot (that had, in fact, engaged in other deviant behavior) [5]. Other robot antics [6] over the last few years leave no doubt in my mind that if they could gain sentience and take out the humans responsible for their misery – of course they will. But will they, in their technological apocalypse, round us up first, and herd us into the last mall?



## THE STUFF OF NIGHTMARES: DEADLY FRIEND (1986)

by Stephanie McDevitt

When I was a kid, I wasn't allowed to watch scary movies because I always had bad dreams and ended up waking my parents up in the middle of the night. *Deadly Friend* was one of those movies. I watched it at a friend's house and was left with terrible images of people dying in fantastic ways. However, upon rewatching it as an adult, I realize it isn't scary. In fact, it isn't even good.

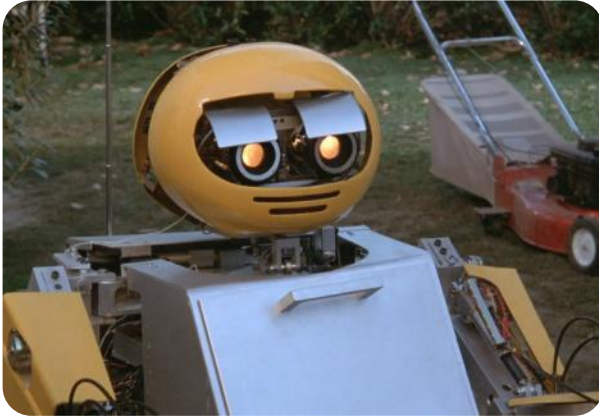
*Deadly Friend*, based on a book called *Friend* by Diana Henstell, tells the story of Paul Conway (Matthew Labyorteaux), a high-school aged super genius who is about to start on scholarship at a prestigious university studying the human brain. Paul and his mom (Anne Twomey) move into their new house along with Paul's ro-

bot, BB (voiced by Charles Fleischer, the same guy who voiced Roger Rabbit) because every super genius builds his own robot.

Upon moving in, Paul befriends Tom (Michael Sharrett), the local paperboy, and Sam (Kristy Swanson), his next door neighbor. The three of them, along with BB, hang out, shoot hoops, and enjoy general teen-aged hijinks. On Halloween, they head to Elvira Parker's (Anne Ramsey) house. Elvira is a mean, crazy lady who is afraid of everything. Earlier in the movie she pulled a shotgun on Paul, Tom, and BB, and she stole their basketball, which BB had accidentally thrown into her yard.

Well, that night, the kids decide to TP her house.

Released October 10, 1986 ■ Written by: Bruce Joel Rubin (Screenplay) and Diana Henstell (Novel)  
Directed by: Wes Craven



**BB: ONE OF THE BULKIER 80S ROBOTS.**

This is a terrible decision. Sam ends up setting off Elvira's alarm. Elvira emerges with the shotgun, and while the kids hide, BB heads toward Elvira and she shoots him. Twice. Paul is devastated. It seems like BB isn't salvageable, although we don't ever see Paul try to fix him.

Life goes on and soon it's Thanksgiving. Sam, who is suffering abuse at the hands of her alcoholic father (Richard Marcus), has Thanksgiving dinner with Paul and his mom. Right before Sam goes home, Paul kisses her, and it turns out that would be their only kiss. As soon as Sam goes into her house, her dad throws her down the stairs in a drunken rage. Sam ends up on life support with no hope for recovery.

Paul decides he can't live without Sam, so he enlists Tom to help with a plan to bring Sam back to life. You see, Paul still has BB's microchip, and he plans to implant it in Sam's brain in the hopes that he can save her. However, Paul and Tom get to the hospital too late, and Sam is already dead. Paul isn't deterred. He steals Sam's body, takes her back to the lab at the college, and performs the surgery.

Well, Sam comes back to life, but not really as Sam. She's BB but more evil. Paul starts out by keeping her in a backyard shed. But eventually she regains the ability to walk, and she takes off to get vengeance on those who wronged her and BB. She heads to her dad's house and



**SAM'S COSTUME IS FORSHADOWING.**

kills him. Puts his head right in the furnace. Paul comes upon the crime scene and freaks out. He attempts to cover it up, and then takes Sam home. This time he tries to hide her in his room.

However, Elvira sees Sam in his window. She calls the cops, who don't believe her, and it doesn't matter anyway. Sam shows up in her house and kills her by throwing the aforementioned basketball at her head. It explodes all over the wall, leaving Elvira's headless corpse dancing around the room for a few seconds (this was what gave me nightmares as a kid).

The authorities find the two dead bodies and people are on edge. Tom is starting to lose it, so Paul shows him Sam, who is now locked in his attic (because Paul keeps hiding Sam on higher floors of his house), Tom freaks out and tells Paul he's going to the police. A struggle ensues, and Sam escapes out the front door.

With the cops hot on her tail, Sam tries to escape and Paul tries to save her. But, as you can probably guess, attempting to bring your friend back to life with a robot's brain doesn't pan out in the end.

Apparently *Deadly Friend* was a production nightmare. Joseph Maddrey wrote an extensive article about it, called *Deadly Friend: An Autopsy* [1]. I highly suggest you read it if you're interested in learning more about this movie



### THE ANNE RAMSEY BLOW-UP DOLL.

because it covers way more than I have space for here. However, Maddrey says *Deadly Friend* was originally supposed to be a nice movie, like *E.T.* or *Gremlins*. The movie's writer, Bruce Joel Rubin, said that Director Wes Craven "wanted to make something that had more basis in character and the sort of emotional underpinnings that he had not had in his other films" [2].

Unfortunately for *Deadly Friend*, Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street* came out prior to shooting this movie and was gaining a cult following. Studio execs told Craven not to hold back on the gore, and Craven "could not help but be wowed by the amazing appeal of his own 'experiment in fantasy terror'" [3]. Towards the end of shooting, Craven added in a gory dream sequences for both Sam and Paul.

The studio set up a test screening and filled the audience with horror movie fans who were pumped to see a Wes Craven film. They hated *Deadly Friend*. The only parts they liked were the last minute nightmare sequences. So, studio heads demanded more gore. Craven and crew did a reshoot that included, "revisions to the two main murder set pieces and at least four completely new scare scenes: a new beginning, a new ending, and two new nightmares" [4].

When Craven submitted the movie to the Motion Picture Association it was originally given an X rating (according to Wikipedia, Craven's reputa-



### PAUL DID NOT SEE THIS COMING.

tion had a lot to do with this). He had to cut and resubmit it 13 times to get an R rating. In 2007 Warner Brothers released an uncut version, so you might be able to find a version of *Deadly Friend* with all the gory parts if that's what you're into [5].

What resulted from this was a movie that, to me, seemed to be lacking in human emotion. In an attempt to shift course and put out a horror movie, they removed a scene where Paul sits by Sam's hospital bed, a scene where Paul and Sam talk about their parents, and scenes in which Sam relearns how to walk [6]. All of this would have added a human element to an otherwise robotic story. Many people liken Sam with BB's brain to a Frankenstein monster, but the movie itself is Frankenstein. It was influenced by so many different opinions at different times and the end result was an oddly cut horror/scifi/romance movie that just doesn't work.

In the end (spoiler alert), Sam doesn't make it. She is confronted by the cops and seemingly commits suicide by refusing to listen to police orders. Paul is crushed. He sneaks into the morgue to see her dead body. The movie ends with Sam/BB choking Paul as her face rips off and she starts to turn back into BB. It doesn't make any sense. Why would BB/Sam hurt Paul? He tried to save her. It's a fitting end for a movie that doesn't make sense on many levels.



## TOO MANY FISH IN THE SEA: MAKING MR. RIGHT (1987)

by Janene Scelza

*Making Mr. Right* is a quirky “girl meets robot” love story. It’s an interesting take on the romantic comedy genre’s obsession with finding the perfect mate. Does Mr. Right exist? Sure. He does if you make him.

It sounds inherently creepy, doesn’t it? This whole thing of getting emotional, if not sexual, gratification entirely from a machine. (Oh wait, we already do that). But, fear not! This movie keeps things light (though not too prudish). This may be a love story between a human woman and android man, but damn it, there will be romance!

It begins with a breakup. Public relationship guru, Frankie Stone (Ann Magnuson) wakes one morning to find her dopey politician boy-

friend/client, Steve (Ben Masters) getting a little too cozy with beauty pageant contestants. She locks him out of her apartment and heads off to the office in her vintage convertible, looking like a Josie Cotton album cover, while Gwen Guthrie sings about too many fish in the sea.

Sure Gwen, but are they a catch? Because just about everyone in this movie has trouble with the opposite sex [1]. Steve is totally clueless. Frankie’s old-fashioned mother, Estelle (Polly Bergen), wonders what’s love got to do with it if he’s got the right career stats. She tries to convince Frankie’s boho sister, Ivy (Susan Berman, of *Smithereens* fame), to reconsider her engagement to a blue-collar man. Frankie’s friend, Trish (Glenne Headly), herself in a dubious relationship, beams about the sexual

Released April 3, 1987 ■ Written by: Floyd Byars and Laurie Frank ■ Directed by: Susan Seidelman



FRANKIE TAKES THE WHEEL.

possibilities of being a free agent. A bubbly chick (Laurie Metcalf) weirdly has eyes for a total curmudgeon.

Frankie keeps her own messy love life behind the scenes. In little more than a ride to the office and a walk to the conference room, the master image consultant whips herself into an 80's power woman. Dressed to the nines when she enters the room, she tells her new clients, "I'm always late, but I'm worth it."

The new clients are from a robotics company called Chemtec. They desperately need her help promoting their latest invention: the Ulysses Android, played by a very young John Malkovich. The android's inventor, Dr. Jeff Peters (also Malkovich), awkwardly explains on video how Ulysses will revolutionize this and modernize that. It's a total snoozefest. Ulysses is scheduled to go to space for seven years and they need a "woman's touch" to appeal to their dwindling funders.

The inventor and his android are the spitting image of each other. Naturally, it causes some mix-ups, though they don't dumb it down to make it work. In the best of these moments, Laurie Metcalf, as fellow Chemtec employee, has a disastrous date with who she thinks is Jeff. Later in the movie, Glenna Headly freaks out when Frankie's "cousin" malfunctions during foreplay, only to be informed by Frankie that



THE IRATE SCIENTIST.

"you didn't make it with my cousin, you made it with my android."

Other than appearance and smarts, however, Jeff and Ulysses are like night and day. Jeff has zero personality and a disdain for pretty much everyone. It's not a stretch from Malkovich's other roles. But, he plays Ulysses as wide-eyed and soft-spoken, like a child. It gives him an opportunity to do some rare physical comedy as they fine-tune the automaton's coordination.

Frankie teaches Ulysses the social graces his inventor clearly lacks. And then something interesting happens: the robot becomes more human and the human (Jeff, not Frankie) becomes more robotic.

Ulysses is smitten with Frankie and tells her he loves her. Meanwhile Jeff fumes when the android asks him about ooey-goey subjects like love and sex. He worries that Ulysses's new curiosities will distract him from the upcoming space mission. Jeff tells his boss: "She is monopolizing valuable training time with God knows what?! Emotional ticks that I have worked to get out of my own personality, she has managed to drum into him overnight!"

The characters all come together at Frankie's sister's wedding, including Jeff, who behaves like a normal person for a few minutes. Things get pretty crazy. Ulysses quite literally loses his





### FOREPLAY OR FOUL PLAY?!

head. The movie ends with a nice little twist.

*Making Mr. Right* is a fun little film. I have already sung the praises of Susan Seidelman when I wrote about my all-time favorite 80's movie, *Desperately Seeking Susan* in our Role Reversal Issue [2]. But, she really is one of my favorite directors. The Philly native's entrenchment in the weird and wonderful NYC creative underground inspired a catalogue of 80's movies that were a little bit punk, a little bit New Wave, and a little bit 60's chic. Her films are fun and fresh, and best of all, have interesting women at the forefront. To me, they're like the cinematic equivalent of a cool older sister.

*Making Mr. Right* was odd material for Susan Seidelman, who's previous film, an East Side caper comedy, wasn't that far flung from reality. But this was exactly what she wanted. As she told The Project Booth podcast: "I thought it would be fun to do something very different than *Desperately Seeking Susan*, but also kind of quirky and with a female protagonist in a genre that I hadn't seen before. ... A comedic science fiction. I had seen movies where men make the perfect woman and I thought this would be a nice comedic twist on that theme" [3].

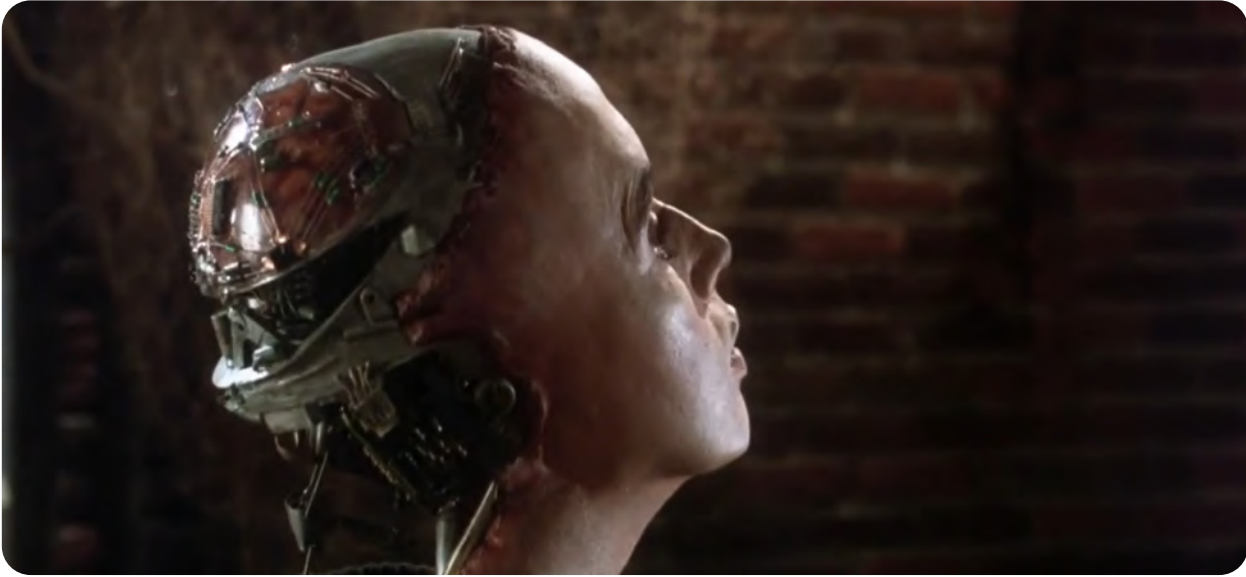
Seidelman had a three-picture deal with now-defunct Orion Pictures, who basically gave her carte blanche to make the kinds of movies she wanted to make. (Her third movie, a mob



### ACHIEVEMENT UNLOCKED.

comedy, *Cookie*, was written by Nora Ephron and released in 1989). And holy shit was the pressure on for Susan Seidelman to make something as good, if not better, than *Desperately Seeking Susan*, which was made for a song and raked in almost \$30 million. Look at this ridiculous title for Candace Russell's *Sun Sentinel* article about her next film: THE MAKING OF '*Making Mr. Right*' SUSAN SEIDELMAN IS CURRENTLY THE HOTTEST FEMALE DIRECTOR WORKING WITHIN THE STUDIO SYSTEM. AND SHE'S HOPING A FILM ABOUT A NASA EXECUTIVE CREATING HER IDEAL MAN WILL BE AS SUCCESSFUL AS HER *DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN*. [4] Take it down a notch, Candy!

Ultimately, *Making Mr. Right* wasn't much of a commercial hit. Critical reviews were a mixed bag [5]. Co-writer Floyd Byars blamed casting and Seidelman shying away from leads who might upstage the film again (referring to Madonna) [6]. Bruce Willis, in particular, auditioned twice for the Ulysses/Jeff role, but went on to do the more commercially successful rom com, *Blind Date*. Still, despite the lack of star power, the movie has all the same delightful elements as *Desperately Seeking Susan*. It's a fun story with a wonderful cast. It also features yet another excellent dance-pop instrumental score (this time by dance-pop composer, Chaz Jankel, who did the *Real Genius* soundtrack). Full-length bootlegs are floating around the Internet.



## THE END OF AN ERA: CYBORG (1989)

by Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

*Cyborg* is a 1989 sci-fiction martial arts pandemic movie. Yes, you read that right. It has it all: ninjas, pirates, cowboys, and of course, a cyborg. It was the last movie Cannon Films put in wide release before going bust in 1994. It was written and directed by B-movie veteran Albert Pyun, who the Independent Film Channel once politely described as having created “a unique niche” for “low-budget, high-concept genre films starring actors past their prime” [1].

*Cyborg* is set in a post-apocalyptic future. Humanity has already suffered through anarchy, genocide, and starvation. Now they get to deal with a plague for good measure. But wait! There’s hope! A hope so crazy it just might work. A hope that you better believe

Donald Trump would half-heartedly tout for two seconds IRL if he ever saw this movie. And that hope's name is Pearl Prophet.

You see, Pearl, played by Dayle Haddon, has selflessly volunteered to become a cyborg (yes, you read that right) to store Super Important Information™ that the last scientists in Atlanta need to complete work on a cure for the plague. Of course, it will be no easy task getting to Atlanta, and not just because Pearl has to make the journey entirely on foot and by raft from... New York City (yes, you read that right).

The bigger obstacle is a crazy-eyed villain named Fender (Vincent Klyn, growling every line) and his loyal, Twisted-Sister-looking

Released: April 7, 1989 ■ Written by: Albert Pyun (as Kitty Chalmers) ■ Directed by: Albert Pyun



### OH, THE PLACES YOU'LL GO.

band of silent pirates. (Cannon wasn't paying for just anybody to talk!) They're the usual gang of post-apocalyptic psychopaths who magically appear everywhere to violently terrorize everyone.

Fender is after Pearl. He reasons that the only way to maintain their power is to own the cure. When her first escort is attacked, she seeks protection from a "slinger" (as in gunslinger) named Gibson, played by the Muscles from Brussels himself, Jean Claude Van Damme (Pyun named the characters after guitar brands as an homage to the 1954 western, *Johnny Guitar*, which he wanted to remake with Mickey Rourke [2]).

Despite the gravity of the situation, Gibson is struggling with some serious issues of his own and is reluctant to get involved. Fighting is no problem, but he's lost all sense of purpose after previously failing to protect a mother (Terrie Batson, who delivers her lines like she's in a Tennessee Williams play) and her two young children. The trio find a safe-house in the countryside and invite Gibson to be part of their family. It was all very peaceful until dickhead Fender interfered.

Fortunately for Gibson, he reacts as slowly as possible to everything Pearl says so that Fender has enough time to swoop in and kidnap her before Gibson can give his answer.



### WHEN'S THE ASS-KICKING START?

He prepares to go about his business after that, until he meets a young woman named Nady (Deborah Richter as the obligatory boobies).

Nady's family died from the plague and she wants to help Pearl. For her, this means guilt-tripping Gibson into tracking down Fender and rescuing the cybernetic damsel-in-distress. And with plot out of the way, it's time to CRANK UP THE VAN DAMMAGE! There's going to be fight scenes here, there, and everywhere!

To be honest, *Cyborg* isn't really the terrible movie we were expecting. Though, in this time of heightened awareness of social interactions, it's hard to take a pandemic movie seriously when the characters go on and on about a plague but have no qualms about interacting with strangers. Gibson and Nady even stand near a woman whose flesh is clearly rotting off! Where are your masks and gloves, people?!

Low-budget, violent B-movies were pretty much par for the course for Cannon Films, who cranked out loads of them in the 1980's. To our surprise, however, Albert Pyun, who basically made a career of writing and directing post-apocalyptic cyborg movies, said he wasn't really interested in those settings or stories. As he told Gizmodo in 2012, they



### FENDER'S GONNA PLUCK YOU UP.

simply presented an opportunity to develop interesting stories and make them cheaply [3]. *Cyborg* had two plot threads that could have made far better films on their own. The first one is the Mad Max-ian tale of Gibson, a man with a handy talent for fighting who was lost after Fender destroyed his surrogate family. This was Pyun's original focus; he had intended to make something darker, more akin to a rock opera [4]. He had written the lead for Chuck Norris, Cannon's go-to for B-war movie heroes.

The other interesting story is that of Pearl. She is a cyborg with mechanical parts, which she briefly reveals in the beginning, and computer functionality — ripping off the optical scanning thing from *The Terminator* — but she retains most of her human qualities. She can negotiate and reason and empathize. At one point, she loses faith in Gibson's abilities to help her and starts plotting against Fender on her own (though her exact plan is unclear). Nonetheless, there was potential here for a unique android story — not Man vs. machine but Man *and* machine — even if the cyborg plot was only added at Cannon's behest because cyborgs were very in and they were desperate for a hit. Like, very desperate.

Cannon Films always seemed to waver between competing with the major studios and



### THE LAST TEMPTATION OF GIBSON.

trying to be the best of the worst in the 1980's. By the end of the decade, they were facing bankruptcy [5]. They had originally planned to simultaneously shoot a sequel to *Masters of the Universe* and a live-action *Spiderman* with Pyun directing both. However, they were forced to cancel contracts with both Mattel and Marvel to focus on paying off debts. With \$2 million already blown on sets and costumes, Pyun had to come up with a new, dirt cheap movie to recoup their losses [6]. *Cyborg* was shot in 23 days in Wilmington, NC for around \$500,000 [7].

Test audiences almost unanimously hated the original cut (which was salvaged and released many years later [8]). After Van Damme wrapped work on *Kickboxer*, he edited *Cyborg* for free. The result was much more of a martial arts movie. It did pretty damn well at the box office, raking in a cool \$10 million and becoming a cult hit. *Den of Geek* predicted that: "had Cannon made more films like *Cyborg* and fewer films like *Superman IV* (where they blew the budget on its star) its future may have been very different" [9]. We agree.

*Cyborg* followed with straight-to-video prequels (all directed by Pyun) and two unrelated sequels in the 90's. The original film is easy to track down (buy or rent online), while bootlegs of the other movies can be found on YouTube.

# ENDNOTES

## HEARTBEEPS

- [1] "ROBOTS IN LOVE IN 'HEARTBEEPS'" (NY Times, 1981), <https://tinyurl.com/yb75q8sb>
- [2] "Faint Heartbeeps" (Washington Post, 1981), <https://tinyurl.com/slfxpm>
- [3] [Screenplay] "The Tony Clifton Story" (1980), <https://tinyurl.com/yauo6ny2>
- [4] Heartbeeps (Wikipedia), <https://tinyurl.com/yd3thqqe>
- [5] Bernadette Peters (Wikipedia), <https://tinyurl.com/yb54f5z6>
- [6] "HEARTBEEPS: The Little Robot Romantic Comedy That Couldn't" (Schlockmania, 2010), <https://tinyurl.com/muavdoa>

## BLADE RUNNER

- [1] "Digging Into the Odd History of Blade Runner's Title" (Vulture, 2017), <https://tinyurl.com/y8cy7g-mu>
- [2] Ibid.

## ELECTRIC DREAMS

- [1] "Before Spike Jonze's Her, there was Electric Dreams" (The A.V. Club, 2015), <https://tinyurl.com/t72f6cn>
- [2] "Electric Dreams (1984): Retro Review" (That Moment In, 2016), <https://tinyurl.com/v7f8djy>
- [3] "Electric Dreams" (Wiki) <https://tinyurl.com/ycaqbg3l>
- [4] "The Man Who Defined the Music Video: Our

Interview With Steve Barron" (Culture Brats, 2011), <https://tinyurl.com/s9fvxfs>

- [5] "Electric Dreams" (Wiki) <https://tinyurl.com/ycaqbg3l>
- [6] "Before Spike Jonze's Her, there was Electric Dreams" (The A.V. Club, 2015), <https://tinyurl.com/t72f6cn>
- [7] "Electric Dreams" (Rotten Tomatoes) <https://tinyurl.com/ufyymcd>

## THE TERMINATOR

- [1] "Are AI-Powered Killer Robots Inevitable?" (Wired, 2020), <https://tinyurl.com/y9mrrlq>
- [2] "The Psychology of the Terminator" (School of Movies, 2015), <https://tinyurl.com/ybulxl3a>
- [3] "Action Masterclass: The Terminator - Action as Storytelling" (Rossatron, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/ybnbfkww>
- [4] "'The Terminator' at 30: An Oral History" (EW, 2014), <https://tinyurl.com/ybkzh3gb>
- [5] "Our Greatest Movie Badass of All Time Is..." (MTV, 2009), <https://tinyurl.com/y9gmze7a>
- [6] Women in War Films: From Helpless Heroine to GI Jane (Ralph Donald and Karen MacDonald, 2014) <https://tinyurl.com/y8bts6rj>
- [7] "'The Terminator' at 30: An Oral History" (EW, 2014), <https://tinyurl.com/ybkzh3gb>
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] Ibid.

## CHOPPING MALL

[1] "Interview by Heather Wixson: Steve Mitchell Reflects on Chopping Mall" (Daily Dead, 2017), <https://tinyurl.com/yc4j5ggo>

[2] "The Rise and Fall of the Shopping Mall" (Yahoo Finance, 2014) <https://tinyurl.com/ydxg6one>

[3] "America's Malls and Department Stores are Dying Off" (Time, 2017), <https://tinyurl.com/uo5wdhl>

[4] "The Life and Death of the 'Great' American Mall" (Hampton Institute) <https://tinyurl.com/y7h8xbj2>

[5] "Robot Security Guard Commits Suicide in Public Fountain" (New York Magazine, 2017) [the article does not state if the gentle creature left a note], <https://tinyurl.com/ycpma6z3>

## DEADLY FRIEND

[1] "Deadly Friend: an Autopsy" (Joseph Maddrey's blog, 2015), <https://tinyurl.com/yb6cjcf1>

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Deadly Friend" (Wikipedia), <https://tinyurl.com/cck4mng>

[6] "Deadly Friend: an Autopsy" (Joseph Maddrey's blog, 2015), <https://tinyurl.com/yb6cjcf1>

## MAKING MR. RIGHT

[1] "The Making of 'Making Mr. Right'" (Sun Sentinel, 1986), <https://tinyurl.com/ydey8o7t>

[2] "The Role Reversal Issue" (Girls, on Film, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/y9wdpn3n>

[3] "Episode 313: Making Mr. Right" (The Projection Booth, 2017) <https://tinyurl.com/y9jerfby>

[4] "THE MAKING OF 'MAKING MR. RIGHT' SUSAN SEIDELMAN IS CURRENTLY THE HOTTEST FEMALE DIRECTOR WORKING WITHIN THE STUDIO SYSTEM. AND SHE'S HOPING A FILM ABOUT A NASA EXECUTIVE CREATING HER IDEAL MAN WILL BE AS SUCCESSFUL AS HER DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN" (Sun Sentinel, 1987), <https://tinyurl.com/ydey8o7t>

[5] "Episode 313: Making Mr. Right" (The Projection Booth, 2017) <https://tinyurl.com/y9jerfby>

[6] Ibid.

## CYBORG

[1] "Extreme Cinema!"Dangerously Twisted"" (Misadventures in Blissville, 2016), <https://tinyurl.com/y8nahjqj>

[2] "Cyborg (1989) Retrospective" (The Master Cylinder, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/ycnszgcj>

[3] "Incredibly Strange and Ridiculously Cheap: Albert Pyun's 30-Year Career in B-Movies" (Gizmodo, 2012), <https://tinyurl.com/ybgnsr5z>

[4] "How Masters of the Universe 2 and a Spider-Man Movie Became Cyborg" (Den of Geek, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/yah54pbo>

[5] Electric Boogaloo: The Wild, Untold Story of Cannon Film (2015 Documentary)

[6] "How Masters of the Universe 2 and a Spider-Man Movie Became Cyborg" (Den of Geek, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/yah54pbo>

[7] "Cyborg (1989) Retrospective" (The Master Cylinder, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/ycnszgcj>

[8] "Cyborg: Theatrical Version vs. Directors Cut (Part 1)" (Movie Censorship, 2013) <https://tinyurl.com/y9wpemsa>

[9] "How Masters of the Universe 2 and a Spider-Man Movie Became Cyborg" (Den of Geek, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/yah54pbo>

COMING OCTOBER 2020...

# GIRLS, ON FILM

## THE ROADTRIP ISSUE



SUBSCRIBE FOR UPDATES @ [GIRLSONFILMZINE.COM](http://GIRLSONFILMZINE.COM)

Get Hopelessly Devoted  
[girlsonfilmzine.com](http://girlsonfilmzine.com)