

1980



*Girls on Film
High School*

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FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH | HEATHERS | RISKY BUSINESS | SAY ANYTHING
TUFF TURF | THREE O'CLOCK HIGH | STUDENT BODIES | PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED

Girls on Film

ISSUE #13, AUG 2021

THE HIGH SCHOOL ISSUE

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Attention, class...

Welcome to *Girls, on Film* is the fanzine that is hopelessly devoted to 80s movies! Each issue covers eight movies related to a particular theme. In this issue, we cover one of the decade's most popular genres: the high school movie.

What's on the Schedule

Student Bodies (1981) An asthmatic killer stalks the very horny senior class of Lamab High.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) Teens come of age over the school year, dealing with sex, heartbreak, buzzkill teachers, and everything else high school has to offer.

Risky Business (1983) A rule-abiding teen is encouraged to take a walk on the wild side while his parents are out of town.

Tuff Turf (1985) These are the mean streets of fire where 'reputations are earned' and the film where young girls began lifelong obsessions with fashion, music, and James Spader.

Peggy Sue Got Married (1986) Kathleen Turner goes back in time to try to rid herself of her cheating, lying husband.

Three O'Clock High (1987) A wimp inadvertently pisses off the crazy new kid who challenges him to a fight after school.

Heathers (1989) Teen-aged lovers murder the popular kids and stage the deaths as suicides to try to subvert the high school social order.

Say Anything (1989) A high school valedictorian falls for a kick-boxing underachiever the summer after graduation.

Behind the Zines

Stephanie McDevitt Co-Founder & 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-Founder & Co-Editor

Janene has written loads of zines over the years. She spent her teen years combing musty video stores and public libraries for all the '80s movies she could find. 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 Regular Contributor

Rhonda, a teacher and freelance writer, raised adolescent hell in the '80s and the horror films of that era were her BFFs! She loves all of '80s pop culture, but nothing spoke to

her quite like *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama*, *Nightmare Sisters*, and *Reform School Girls*. She had a pink laminated Video Time Video rental card at 9 years old and she never looked back. Or forward, really; she still loves her VHS and sweet, sweet VCR. And let it be known: the scrunchie never died for Rhonda: she STILL wears one proudly!

Matt Scelza Contributing 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.

Jessica MacLeish Guest Writer

Jessica MacLeish is a Veronica, not a Heather. She's also a writer, editor, and late 80s baby who loves watching, thinking about, talking about, and writing about movies.

All digital issues of *Girls, on Film* are available, for free, at girlsonfilmzine.com. We publish quarterly. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, or subscribe to our newsletter for notifications about new issues. For prints, trades, guest submissions, and collaborations, email Steph & Janene at info@girlsonfilmzine.com.



Garbage Gets Me Hot!

STUDENT BODIES

by Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

The 1980s was rife with spoof comedies -- Some of the best, in fact. The decade kicked off with the massively successful *Airplane!*, a film still widely regarded as the funniest parody, if not the funniest movie, of all time. The years followed with hits like *This is Spinal Tap* (1984), *Clue* (1985), *Spaceballs* (1987), and *The Naked Gun* (1988).

One of our favorite 80s spoofs is *Student Bodies*, a hilariously dumb whodunnit that hit theaters the year after *Airplane!* Long before *Scream* and *Scary Movie*, *Student Bodies* poked fun at the dopey tropes of slasher movies, which were also plentiful (and profitable) in the 1980s. This even served as the opening joke in *Student Bodies*: "This motion picture is based on an actual incident. Last year 26 horror films were released... None of them lost money." For extra measure, a spokesman interrupts the film at the 28-minute mark to deliver the film's sole (and naughtiest) expletive because R-rated films perform better at the box office. (Spoilers: none of this helped the film's commercial viability).

The typical 80s slasher movie involves a masked killer disgusted by sex who terrorizes a select group of all-American teenagers eager to smash. There's a handful of suspects ("it can't be anybody, it's gotta be somebody!") who are meant to keep you guessing to the very end (and they would've gotten away with it if it, too, wasn't for those meddling kids)! In *Student Bodies*, this mystery killer is an asthmatic, chicken-lipped individual known as The Breather (voiced by producer Jerry Belson and *NOT Law & Order* veteran Richard Belzer, as he is so often credited [1]). The Breather stalks only the students of Lamab High School having sex ("there goes the entire senior class!"). No babysitting gig, funeral, football field bleacher, parade float, or shop class is safe to fool around!

Principal Harlow (Joe Talarowski) informs his students about their little homicide problem. "The good news is the killer has definitely been identified as a psychotic individual suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. He is armed and dangerous. The bad news is we

RELEASED AUG 7, 1981 - WRITTEN BY MICKEY ROSE - DIRECTED BY MICKEY ROSE & MICHAEL RITCHIE (UNCREATED)

GIRLS ON FILM: THE HIGH SCHOOL ISSUE



THIS MOTHER CLUCKER WON'T STOP CALLING



PRINCIPAL HARLOW TAKES TO THE MIC



TOBY DIDN'T DO IT! SHE NEVER DOES IT!



SOMEONE TALKING... DURING HORSE HEAD BOOKENDS?

have no idea who it is. If anyone should come across an individual matching this description, please call me at once. But, don't do it in front of him. And remember ... the Big Football Game!"

Psycho on the loose though there may be, *The Breather* at least thoughtfully keeps viewers apprised of potential suspects, character missteps, and, of course, the body count. Harlow, along with a few other teachers and staffers -- including a double-jointed janitorial oddity named Malvert, played by a comedian known only as The Stick -- top the list of weird and wacky suspects.

Malvert understandably gets all the attention in commentaries about the film, but our favorite character is Mr. Dumpkin (Joe Flood), the repressed shop teacher who considers the horse head bookend to be man's highest cultural achievement. "Someone talking? During horse head bookends! Of course, the girl, Miss Shouldn't Be in the Class Anyway!"

The girl to which he refers is sweet, chaste senior Toby Badger (Kristen Riter), who is the most suspect of all. The compulsive cock-blocker turns up at every murder scene. But, the "Prince Valiant in a plum sweater" assures us that murder is simply out of character ("I didn't do it! I never do it!"), and that she couldn't possibly be the killer. Will the Real Chicken Lips please stand up?

Student Bodies lampoons popular teen slasher movies of the day, like *Carrie* (1976), *Halloween* (1978), *When a Stranger Calls* (1979), and *Prom Night* (1980), among other popular horror films [2]. It opens with the familiar scene of the lonely babysitter being harassed by some weirdo on the phone. (They do the same in the opening of *Scream*). Her boyfriend is due any minute so they can "knock the boots," as the kids used to say. The *Breather* complains about the obligatory impractical disguise -- oversized galoshes -- and there's a running gag about getting slowed down because the killer keeps stepping in gum. True to the genre, *The Breather* also applies creativity to

his work. The first murder weapon is a paper clip. Lots of them.

Though released in 1981, we didn't discover *Student Bodies* until the mid-90s when it aired on one of those campy late-nite cable programs. Shows like USA's *Up All Night*, hosted by Gilbert Gottfried, or Joe Bob Briggs's *Monstervision* on TNT specialized in B-movies (and sometimes worse) that were cheap to license and a laugh to watch. In addition to home video, this was how movies of yore gained their cult following. It did for *Student Bodies*.

The film certainly looked like a cheap production, although *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby suggested otherwise [3]. While the Screen Writer's Guild was on strike in 1981, "Paramount Pictures, the producer and distributor of many horror films of the 80s ... wanted to release as many non-union films as possible and *Student Bodies* fell into that niche. This would explain the largely unknown cast, the low budget quality, and obscure nature the film took on after its release" [4]. *Student Bodies* was shot on location in and around Houston, Texas with a cast of complete unknowns. "We're talking seventy-five percent of the picture's cast are actual nobodies..." [5]. (Check out Kristen Riter as one of J. Geil's homelier admirers in the band's Centerfold music video -- it's on Youtube).

This is how we always thought of the movie: a cheap, hilariously dumb B-comedy that its cast and crew didn't take too seriously. Yet, the filmmakers had some pretty respectable resumes. Writer/director Mickey Rose was an early Woody Allen collaborator and notable TV comedy writer. Producer and unofficial co-director, originally credited with the scandalous Alan Smithee moniker Michael Ritchie, worked on popular films like *The Candidate* (1972), the first two *Bad News Bears* movies, and two *Fletch* films. Jerry Belson, who also produced the film, wrote for Tracey Ullman in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. On top of that, *Student Bodies* was submitted for review by legit critics, and not surprisingly... they weren't fans.

How?! Why?! This is one time we wish there was more backstory available on the making of a (relatively unknown?) 80s cult favorite. Unfortunately, Mickey Rose, Michael Ritchie, and Jerry Belson didn't live long enough into the Podcast Age, when one of the film's admirers could have given them the platform to tell the story. They were, presumably, inspired by the humor (and success) of *Airplane!*, though the whole thing feels more reminiscent of zany Lou Adler comedies like *Rock n' Roll High School* (1979) and *Get Crazy* (1983), but without the tits and ass.

And, maybe that was the problem? Unlike *Scream* and *Scary Movie* years later, *Student Bodies* never really looked like a slasher movie. The AV Club said it best: "What Rose, Ritchie, and Belson missed was the reason why American cinema had suddenly gone slasher-crazy. Unlike later meta-horror pictures like *April Fool's Day* or *Scream* -- or even other parody movies like the previous year's undoubtedly inspirational *Airplane!* -- *Student Bodies* never makes any real effort to look or feel like what it's skewering. If anything, it comes across more like one of the brightly lit, slightly shaggy high school sex comedies that were also in fashion around the time" [6].

That made the transition to Cable TV pretty easy, since all you really had to cut out was a solitary F-bomb. But, someone must have expressed similar concern about the film because it ends with a weird funhouse style fever dream where Toby is chased through the halls by Lamab's assorted characters. And it ends with a jarring, legit horror scene ala *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *Carrie* (1976).

Still, *Student Bodies* is endlessly quotable popcorn nonsense that we highly recommend for you fans of strange 80s obscurities ("garbage gets me hot!"). Pop open a Dr. Pepper (appropriately, their 1983 slogan in the UK was "What's the worst that could happen?" [7]) and enjoy this... killer... comedy.



You Either Do It or You Don't

FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH

by Jessica MacLeish

What is there to say about *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* that hasn't already been said? I first saw this movie in high school, after it was gifted to me as part of a DVD box set along with *Dazed and Confused*. As a point of comparison, even though there's no real reason to compare the two except for the fact that someone decided to package them into a DVD set in the early aughts, I liked and still like *Dazed and Confused* more, though *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* is probably more culturally significant, which I knew even at the time, thanks to VH1's *I Love the 80s* and its bite-sized pop culture history lessons.

In fact, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* was selected by the Librarian of Congress to be added to the National Film Registry in 2005, an honor bestowed on "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant" films [1]. Marking 1956 and *Rock Around the Clock* as the first film marketed specifically to teenagers [2], *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* came out when the movie industry was just over 15 years into its portrayal on American film screens: the life of the American teen.

Janet Maslin noted that the movie offers up a little bit of high school life heretofore unseen in movies [3], perhaps owing to the fact that Cameron Crowe went undercover in an actual high school to capture the material for the book that he then adapted into *Fast Times* [4]. Roger Ebert panned the film as sexist and a "scuz-pit" --albeit a sexist scuz-pit with some standout acting performances [5]--but audiences responded to it. It earned over six times its budget, grossing over \$27 million in 1982 [6], and continues to pop up on entertainment websites' various lists -- it's #2 on Entertainment Weekly's "50 Best High School Movies" [7]; #87 in American Film Institute's "100 Years...100 Laughs" [8]; and #15 on Bravo's 100 "Funniest Movies" [9].

For the uninitiated, the movie follows an ensemble cast of *Ridgemont High* students (and a few teachers as side characters) over the course of one school year as they go to class (or don't), fall in and out of lust and love, and through it all, work at their jobs at Ridgemont Mall (and other assorted fast food joints). These teens are at the mall just

RELEASED AUG 13, 1982 - WRITTEN BY CAMERON CROWE - DIRECTED BY AMY HECKERLING



MASK UP



DAMONS GETS A CLIENT.



DON'T TELL MOM.



MR. HAND & MR. SPICOLI MAKE PEACE.

about as often as they're at school, which is as much of a testament to their devotion to their after-school jobs as it is to the American consumer culture that was perhaps cresting to new heights in the 1980s.

There's no main character, per se, and the ensemble members are connected in a tangled web, moving in and out of interactions with one another like ships passing in the night -- or classmates walking by one another in a school hallway or at the mall. The vignette-style storytelling leads the movie to feel a bit wandering and slow at times, though many of those scenes will probably live forever in infamy, as they've been reverberating through pop culture since 1982 -- including the bathroom/pool masturbation scene (which was referenced/spoofed on a recent season of Netflix's animated puberty comedy *Big Mouth*); the cafeteria fellatio scene (which was--maybe?--echoed in *Old School* in the early aughts); and Spicoli ordering a pizza to history class (something I can't say for sure that Zack Morris did later in *Saved by the Bell*, but certainly feels like something he would do).

The movie is chiefly concerned with sex, though other aspects of teenage life are covered too: the tedium of going to class and studying; gross Biology class lessons; a big football rivalry; hanging out; needing cash; needing a ride...but really, an undercurrent of sex runs through nearly every plotline (except those of Sean Penn's Jeff Spicoli and Forest Whitaker's Charles Jefferson). Brad (Judge Reinhold) waffles in his long term relationship, eventually gets dumped, finds himself knocked down a few pegs in life, and is almost always thinking about sex. Stacy (Jennifer Jason Leigh), Brad's younger sister who "work[s] at the best food stand in the mall," finds herself experimenting with dating and sex, first with an older man who (as we'd say now) ghosts her, then with the best friend of the guy who has a hopeless crush on her; she then has an abortion and decides she wants romance, not just sex.

The movie seems unsure of what to make of Stacy, who is perhaps as close to a main

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character as we get--it doesn't quite thread the needle of her own curiosity about sex with the existence of social pressure and the fact that she's socially conditioned to think sex is all guys want from girls with the fact that she's clearly searching for something, perhaps because there are a litany of other characters and plots to get to. In the end, you have to hope that Stacy finds love and enjoyable sex one day, when she's ready for it.

Linda (Phoebe Cates, who gets all the best lines), Stacy's older, somewhat cynical (she scoffs at Stacy's desire for romance, telling her friend that they "can't even get cable TV" in Ridgemoat), and more sexually experienced best friend, is constantly doling out (often misguided) advice -- though she is, perhaps progressively for the time, an avid proponent of both partners enjoying sexual activity equally and equitably. Mark "Rat" Ratner, in contrast with his nickname, is shy and skittish when it comes to matters of the heart and bedroom, leading Stacy to mistakenly think he's uninterested in her, which then leads her to pursue Mike Damone for a disappointing five seconds of intercourse in the poolhouse.

And Damone -- AKA the "no-brain little prick" -- is all about his "vibe," the care-free, aloof attitude he tries to exude to attract women. He, too, gives often misguided advice to his best friend; he then hooks up with said best friend's crush, blows her off at school, slut-shames her when she tells him she's pregnant, and bails when it comes time for her abortion. Most of the male attitudes in general towards sex in *Fast Times* are as crude as you might expect--not quite at *Porky's* level, but not exactly nuanced and respectful, either.

The parents are never around, except mentioned in passing a few times in ways that suggest they do have a presence in their kids' lives -- Stacy, for example, routinely asks Brad to keep something or other from their parents, implying that she'd get in trouble if they knew about it -- a presence that nevertheless doesn't make it onscreen. This absence adds to the untethered feeling of these teens' lives,

exemplifying their relative freedom to hang at the mall, go surfing, and get into sexual exploits with little oversight (or consequence) on the parental front.

The obsession with dating and sex, and all the awkwardness that comes with it, seems true to hormonal teenage life, and the portrayal of friendship -- mostly between Stacy and Linda, though more broadly in the way peers' paths can crisscross in random ways during high school -- feels particularly keenly drawn. Beyond those elements, it's the small details (like the Ridgemoat High students cheating in increasingly creative ways during finals) that breathe specificity and life into the movie (details one has to think come right from Crowe's time as an undercover high schooler that informed his book and this movie adaptation of it).

The camerawork is also done in a shaky, tracking style, adding to the effect that *Fast Times* provides an unfiltered snapshot of teenage life. Ultimately, the movie is a total time capsule of a specific time and place. A segment of early 80s Southern California teenage life is preserved in *Fast Times at Ridgemoat High*, in moments like students sniffing their class handouts (presumably for that fresh Xerox scent buzz); a teacher mentioning he's made the switch from coffee to Sanka; another teacher assuming everyone is "on dope;" the three Pat Benatar girls who roam the Ridgemoat halls; the concert tickets Damone sells; and so much more.

Fast Times almost works better as an anthropological study (though it's not a documentary) than a super-engaging movie. That fact, combined with its role as a spiritual successor to so many high school movies that followed (be it the John Hughes flicks of the 80s or the late 90s' *American Pie* or *Can't Hardly Wait*) and a launching pad for so many Hollywood careers (Cameron Crowe, Amy Heckerling, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Sean Penn, Forest Whitaker, and on and on, including a Nicholas Cage cameo), means that *Fast Times* will live on in the American film canon as a movie of importance (even if, when it comes down to it, you'd rather watch *Dazed and Confused*).



Boys to Men

RISKY BUSINESS

by Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

Risky Business was probably the most uber-cool teen movie of the 1980s. It's most iconic scene, the one where a young Tom Cruise dances around in Ray Bans and tighty whities to Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock n' Roll" is probably it's most corniest now, but otherwise, the movie is cool, cool, cool.

It's a teen sex comedy, a genre packed with cheap, dumb, interchangeable T&A romps inspired by *Porky's* (1981). Tom Cruise even co-starred in one, *Losin' It*, which came out in theaters a few months before *Risky Business*. Almost no one saw it, which probably didn't bother Tom Cruise much, since *Risky Business* was the movie that made him a bona fide star. In both films, he is the lowly teen virgin.

Risky Business writer/director Paul Brickman didn't care about (and maybe hadn't seen) *Porky's*. He was heavily influenced by a political drama of all things — Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970) [1]. *Risky Business* would be the Great Experiment: a teen sex

comedy that is sleek, serious and funny. And it worked; the grown-up sexy, darkly satirical, wonderfully atmospheric (as a precursor to the Vaporwave aesthetic and also the gorgeous sequences scored by A-list krautrockers, Tangerine Dream), funny film was a huge hit. The adolescent cluelessness and teenage swagger is especially hilarious to us as we revisit the film long past our teens.

Tom Cruise takes the lead as Joel Goodson, the good son. If you squint really hard, you can see that Joel is a nerd. Tom Cruise seems diabolically opposed to portraying any kind of social pariah, so it might as well be one who's most damning trait is both slight and brief. Joel is the generic all-American teen: good looking and affluent. Nonetheless, he is one of the lowliest teen movie archetypes: the boy virgin.

Joel is wrapping up his senior year of high school, a time often filled with optimism for the future and anxiety for the journey there.

RELEASED AUG 5, 1983 - WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY PAUL BRICKMAN

GIRLS ON FILM: THE HIGH SCHOOL ISSUE



LOOKING FOR HOT SINGLES NEAR YOU?



GUIDO, THE GUN-TOTING PIMP



NOT QUITE PRINCETON MATERIAL... OR IS HE?



CHOO CHOO: THE NEW WHOOPIS

Joel is such a malleable, vanilla character, we don't know much about his desires beyond high school except to major in business. His friends, darlings of the Reagan era, want to pursue whatever path will make them filthy fucking rich. (The crass materialism is gross, but this was 1983, and greed was still good).

But, even with no real plans for the future, Joel is still under a lot of pressure as he is expected to go to a prestigious school, presumably guaranteeing a fruitful life. (Fun fact: he will graduate in time for the '87 Recession). His mom prods him about SAT scores. His dad pulls strings to get him an interview with Princeton, even though he hasn't a hope of getting in (he's not so great on paper). Even Joel's fantasies are riddled with anxiety. A recurring dream about a showering stranger who requests his help with those hard-to-reach places abruptly turns into a nightmare scenario where he shows up to his college boards hours late, thus ruining his future.

Joel is like a prototype for Cameron Frye, Alan Ruck's character in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986). (Though it's not the only similarity). They are constantly told about the rules, and as a result, was fairly risk-averse until the interventions staged by their friends. In *Ferris Bueller*, it's a glorious skip day meant to be a liberating last hurrah before graduation. Here, it's a sexual conquest.

Joel's parents go out of town for several days. And, despite his mother's ubiquitous advice to use his best judgment, things get really crazy. Early attempts at big boy stuff fizzle, like pairing Scotch with a dinner he doesn't know to thaw and reviving up daddy's Porsche for a forbidden midnight ride only to stall in the driveway.

The risky business begins when a friend calls an escort service on Joel's behalf before Joel can cancel. The lead-up to Joel's Big Moment is excellent: budding anticipation;

shock at a towering transvestite (Bruce A. Young); taking pity on Joel and referring him to Lana (Rebecca DeMornay as the Hooker with the Heart of Gold™). He is hesitant, using a fake name ("Ralph, as in puke!") and nervously preparing for arrival. DeMornay's entrance is so hot and dreamy, some young viewer is bound to be disappointed by the actual awkwardness of the first time, especially with a much more experienced partner.

This is one of those movies where the teen misfit experiences a string of disasters that he has limited time to rectify. Joel returns from a trip to the bank to cash in a savings bond from dear old grandma to find his mother's valuable Steuben egg is stolen. He gets on the bad side of a gun-toting pimp named Guido (played by the excellent Joe Pantoliano). His father's car goes for a swim in Lake Michigan. He tarnishes his academic record. He runs a temporary brothel out of his home. Princeton makes a poorly timed house call. And then everything in the house is stolen just hours before Joel's parents are due home.

Joel's calamities are not as sitcom-y as they sound. The film is not just the ultimate straight male fantasy, but the ultimate capitalist fantasy as well, and this is what set it apart from other teen sex comedies. Joel changes -- from lowly virgin to sexually experienced, from the risk averse to risk-taker, from a boy to a man, from privileged "white boy off the lake" to an easy mark for a con, and from the good son to the corrupted.

[Warning: spoilers about the ending below!]

Just as sex and money land Joel in hot water, it gets him out of it, too. He raises enough money at his own pop-up brothel to buy back the all of his things back before his parents get home. And with a wink and a nod, the Princeton admissions rep (Bill Masur) was eventually persuaded to accept Joel ("Princeton could use a guy like Joel"). There is no accountability. (Maybe the Princeton College

Republicans could also use a guy like Joel).

At the end of the film, Joel and Lana reconnect over a fancy dinner and make predictions about their future. Brickman originally envisioned a much darker ending where Joel asks Lana whether she and Guido set him up, and it's really unsettling what she comes to understand about Joel. (The look on her face... yikes). Geffen Studio, which produced the film, tacked a few minutes on to their date that would lighten the mood. Brickman held a grudge for many years, but his version eventually saw the light of day 30-some years later. You can find it on YouTube [2].

Risky Business was a massive commercial hit that not only made Tom Cruise a star, but pretty much launched the career of much of its young pre-stardom cast like DeMornay (who was excellent here), Curtis Armstrong, and Bronson Pinchot. Paul Brickman received lots of praise for his directorial debut (he was already a seasoned writer), but unlike the others, shied away from the fame. He worked on few films since, (regrettably, he would later say) passing on scripts like *Rain Man*.

Brickman told Salon a few years ago: "I found it very uncomfortable. I moved out of L.A. Immediately. Studio heads sent me wine goblets and food baskets. And people threw material at me right and left and lined up to meet me. It gets uncomfortable. Some people like the visibility. I don't. I'm more from the J.D. Salinger school." [3]. The dispute with Geffen and not having that control over his work probably had something to do with his disappearance from Hollywood. (As of this writing, he supported a fundraising campaign for a Tangerine Dream documentary [4]).

The film holds up so well almost 40-years later. We laugh more now at the silliness of its young characters and cringe at the decade's usual chauvinism, but it remains, for us, one of the best teen film of the 1980s.



Time Capsules of Ephemera

TUFF TURF

by Dr. Rhonda Baughman

"Life isn't a problem to be solved. It's a mystery to be lived—so live it."

- Matt Clark as Stuart Hiller

As I got older, I came to understand the truth behind Clark's words, but an even bigger mystery to be lived was my youthful, unyielding naivete which, for better or worse, clings to me like glitter still. That is, I know that shimmering '80s high school chimera onscreen is radically different from brutal, present truths, but I still fantasize of a world without active shooter drills and a gut-level sense of foreboding at the mere thought of working K-12 anywhere but online [1].

Honestly, at 10 years old, I assumed high school would be more sanitary gang activity hijinks like *Tuff Turf* (1984) or Danny Steinmann's grungy punks with razor-blade earrings in *Savage Streets* (1984) [2]. The *Tuff Turf* dream included naughty (but not-too-violent!) campus squabbles, runway-worthy hallway ensembles, and bangin' tunes to accompany a fulfilling, (but not-too-rigorous!) academic mélange. High school would

be the place where beautiful bad boys and wickedly gorgeous girls gathered and after hours attended epic concerts! Well, I did get that last one at least.

Unfortunately, the US would hurtle far past these and other adolescent visions, way past even the surreal Rene Daalder's *Massacre at Central High* (1976) and the quotably hypnotic Michael Lehmann's *Heathers* (1989), discussed later in this issue. Although the '80s helped infuse my soul with a warm, hopeful glow, the current high school era is technically territory that even a brigade of '80s auteurs couldn't make palatable.

Tuff Turf director Fritz Kiersch can shoulder some of the responsibility for my eternal optimism. Kiersch would also give us *Children of the Corn* (1984) and *Under the Boardwalk* (1988), so he's on my list of convention hopefuls to meet one day [3], as is producer Donald P. Borchers. Reading Borchers' name in the opening credits of any film always excited me because I knew I was in for my kind of

RELEASED AUG 13, 1982 - DIRECTED BY AMY HECKERLING - WRITTEN BY CAMERON CROWE



MORGAN'S GONNA NEED A RIDE HOME



FASHIONISTA FRANKIE



MIAMI VICE-ESQUE ART DIRECTION



HOW MANY BULLETS LEFT IN THE GUN?

memorably dark entertainment [4]. Borchers must accept a bit of blame as well for my current foray into the murky waters of producing.

The opening credits for *Tuff Turf* are fantastic--and I'm always confused by anyone who feels otherwise. A flawless, 24 year old James Spader (as Morgan Hiller) bicycles his way through our hearts and into a night fraught with danger, while Marianne Faithful's "Love Hates" radiates from his Walkman. Morgan thwarts a mugging and catches the ire of local gang (The Tuffs) leader Nick (Paul Mones) and his gal, Frankie Croyden (Kim Richards).

Tuff Turf is how I will always remember Kim Richards, long before the marriages, arrests, and reality TV. Richards was physically flawless in *Turf*, (she didn't even need that body double for the nude scene, but whatevs) and thanks to her, I was introduced to fashion necessities like red high heels, upper arm bracelets, chunky necklaces, messy ponytails, hygiene sweaters, and that black dress/attached white tee combo I still own. As far as my film goddess crushes rolled, if I couldn't be Winona Ryder's 'Veronica' in *Heathers*, Jami Gertz's 'Star' in *The Lost Boys* (1987), or Jill Schoelen's 'Beth' in *Thunder Alley* (1985), I would aspire to Richards' 'Frankie'.

TT's plot isn't deep but it is lovable: Morgan Hiller is the new kid in town after the big family move from Connecticut to LA. Whereas they once met at the yacht club, their bourgeois lifestyle has been foiled since his father lost his business; so, while able to dispense sage advice, Morgan's father must now drive a cab to support his family. Young Morgan sees the pitfalls of mindless capitalism and will not succumb to the golden boy expectations his big bro Brian possesses and their snooty mum expects!

Instead, Morgan embraces his rebel constitution and courts trouble, steals a car to court that trouble, and then dances and fights and charms his way out of trouble once in the thick of it. He'll do it all while chatting with Jim Carroll, crashing a country club, allowing the street-savvy Robert Downey, Jr. to side-kick it

with him, and then pull out all teen stops to impress and romance Frankie -- and when he does get the girl, Morgan will have his own advice to dispense and brand of justice to deliver!

Additionally, memorable genre favorites are all over this film (Catya Sassoon, Frances X. McCarthy, Art Evans, Olivia Barash, Ken Abraham, for some examples) and I vividly recall playing Trivial Pursuit where the question asked of me ("This is where reputations are earned?") gave me poignant sign for what I already knew: *Tuff Turf* is a critical film. It always was, no matter the harsh words of criticism from heavy-hitters like Siskel & Ebert.

So much Internet information I wish to access is no longer available (links to old cast and director interviews and podcasts, for example); however, goody for me I can still find Siskel & Ebert reviews. While reading their old mini-analyses online (that originally appeared in print possibly for venerable publications like the *Chicago Sun Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, et al. and are now forever archived on their websites) one thing jumped out at me: Did their review always sound this mean to me, their one job after another? While caustic insight can occasionally be delightful, too much of it obliterates writer credibility.

Ebert's February 1, 1985, review of *Tuff Turf* feels akin to using your forearm to violently swipe a painstakingly arranged table setting to the floor and then lighting the linen napkin on fire -- and just because he could. In that same week, Siskel pumped out his review for *TT* and it felt the snark same words and added little to the overall understanding and importance of the film itself. More modern and general audience reviews describe it as "cheesy," "fun," "a TOP classic," and "enjoyed the fk out of it!" Less than a year ago, another reviewer posted excitedly about some of the less well-known cast (a type of 'here's where a few are now') and mentioned favorite scenes. So, this writer/reviewer makes no mistake here--*Tuff Turf* is a significant film.

Tuff Turf is currently streaming, but I could only re-visit the film for this essay on my bat-

tered, beloved VHS copy. While researching, it pleased me to find three things: the DVD combo of *Tuff Turf* and *Under the Boardwalk*, a blu-ray release of *Turf*, and the 8 film DVD collection called '80s Guilty Pleasures, which includes *Reform School Girls* (1986), *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* (1985), and *Fraternity Vacation* (1985) with *TT* -- it's like someone asked: "What guilty pleasure movies would Rhonda slap together and not even feel a little bit guilty about?"

Along with my old K-Mart VHS, I do own a small poster, the paperback tie-in, and the soundtrack on vinyl. The song *TT* lovers really want is not on the soundtrack, although as it turns out, Spader is lip-syncing his piano-crooning country club debut to "We Walk the Night" (performed by Paul Carney). The *Tuff*'est connoisseurs purchased the individual albums of the artists, too, just in case the soundtrack skipped.

Moreover, eBay is a beautiful hot mess of *TT* memorabilia I should not purchase, but it's getting harder and harder to resist -- I'm weak: promo items like a switchblade comb with the logo on the handle, a German poster under the title *The Love Fighters*, and clearly, someone as infatuated with the film as me has a signed laserdisc (possible soundtrack) of eight (!) cast members--both stars and bit players. Just reading the notes of where and when the autographs were obtained gave me chills__this was a true *Tuff Turf* fan.

Clearly, *Tuff Turf* is part of the destiny of the collective unconscious. Fate. Providence! All of it bordering on synchronous predestination one could say. Or more likely, it's just a small reminder of what even the most seemingly inconsequential of films can give us: the notice, in fact, to appreciate the whimsical and silly products of their time, to love and welcome these time capsules of ephemera for exactly what they are -- reflections of us, fragments of who we once were and can still be.



Why I Feel Blue PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED

by Stephanie McDevitt

Peggy Sue Got Married is a pseudo time travel movie that revolves around everyone's favorite tradition: the high school reunion. What better way to spend the night than with people you haven't seen in years reminiscing over all your shared drama and trauma? *Peggy Sue* doubles down on high school trauma by not only making the main character relive it at the reunion, but by also sending her back in time to relive it as a grown woman inside a teenager's body.

The movie opens in 1985 as Peggy Sue (Kathleen Turner) gets ready to go to her 25-year high school reunion. She tells her daughter, Beth (Helen Hunt), that she doesn't want to go. Peggy's impending divorce from her high school sweetheart, Charlie (Nicolas Cage), makes her hesitant to see her classmates. Everyone knows she married Charlie right after high school, but despite still living in her hometown, a lot of people don't seem to know that Charlie cheated on her. This must be one of those small towns where everyone

minds their own business.

Beth reassures Peggy Sue that the reunion will be fun and that Charlie said he wasn't going to go, so she doesn't have to worry about seeing him. But, of course, Charlie shows up right at the time when they are about to crown a king a queen (because I guess they do that at 25-year high school reunions?). Anyway, Peggy Sue is named queen, but as she's standing on stage, she starts to panic and she passes out. When Peggy Sue wakes up, it's 1960.

Peggy Sue is super confused about why she traveled back in time (as was I because there was no real event that seemed to cause this besides having a panic attack at seeing her cheating husband while standing on stage at her reunion). She eventually sets out to try to change her future. First, Peggy Sue breaks up with Charlie. Well, she kind of breaks up with him. He keeps showing up and she keeps hanging out with him. She also has a fling with

RELEASED OCT 10, 1986 - WRITTEN BY JERRY LEICHTLING & ARLENE SARNER - DIRECTED BY FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

GIRLS ON FILM: THE HIGH SCHOOL ISSUE



PEGGY IS NO LONGER SMITTEN



PEGGY, WITH HER LONG-DEAD GRANDMOTHER



TRYING TO FIND A WAY HOME



BACK IN GOOD OL' 1985

the smart poet in her English class, and she befriends the class valedictorian to get his help returning to 1985.

Peggy Sue Got Married is set up to be a movie about getting a second chance and fixing your mistakes. But that's not what happens at all. In fact, Peggy Sue just keeps making the same mistakes over and over, and she admits that she can't change anything. Even as a 43-year-old woman, she can't escape the choices she made when she was 18. It was all disappointing and frustrating. And, fair warning, I'm going to give away the ending.

I thought this movie had real promise when Peggy Sue sees her mom again for the first time and gets emotional. And then, when her grandmother calls, she freaks out and can't talk to her (what do you say to long dead relatives?). Furthermore, Peggy Sue goes to school and experiences high school culture as an adult and remarks on how horrible it is. These moments were great but they were fleeting. For most of the movie, we're forced to watch Nicolas Cage over act with weird voices and mannerisms.

The role of Charlie was reportedly offered to Dennis Quaid before Nicolas Cage signed on, but he turned it down to star in *The Big Easy*. I could probably write a whole article on Nicolas Cage's acting choices for this movie because, in brief, they were awful. Apparently, he told Director Francis Ford Coppola (his uncle) that he did not want to be in this movie. He finally agreed to do it as long as he could play it way over the top and talk like Pokey from *Gumby*. It was awful and distracting. One of the producers actually flew in to fire him over it, but Coppola insisted Cage would finish the movie [1].

Turner hated Cage's acting choices too. She says she cringes every time she thinks about it [2]. She also said, "If anything, it [Cage's portrayal] only further illustrated my character's disillusionment with the past. The way I saw it

was, yeah, he was that asshole." Turner and Cage didn't get along during filming, and Turner wrote in her biography that his behavior was awful (including 2 DUIs and stealing a chihuahua). In 2008, Cage sued her over these comments and won a public apology (among other damages) [3].

The thing is, Cage knew his acting choices were way over the top. He said that Turner "was very upset because she wanted me to be Al, my character from *Birdy*, and instead she got Jerry Lewis on psychedelia" [4]. He argues that cringe-worthy acting can be funny (see *Moonstruck*), but in *Peggy Sue*, it just falls flat over and over again, and it distracts from any good in the movie.

Apparently, it took a while to get a team together to make this movie. Debra Winger was originally cast as Peggy Sue with Jonathan Demme directing. They had creative differences, so he left the project and Penny Marshall was hired (for what would have been her movie directing debut). She had creative differences with the writers, and when she left the project, Debra Winger went with her [5]. I think Penny Marshall would have made this such a sweet movie and I'm disappointed that it didn't work out with her at the helm.

The production company turned to Coppola in an attempt to woo back Winger, but instead Turner signed on to play Peggy Sue. And it worked out for her because she received an Oscar nomination for this role. (The film was also nominated for Best Cinematography and Best Costume Design). Roger Ebert raved about Turner's performance, saying it was, "a textbook study in body language," [6] because she used her physicality to look like a teenager (they didn't try to make her look younger with makeup).

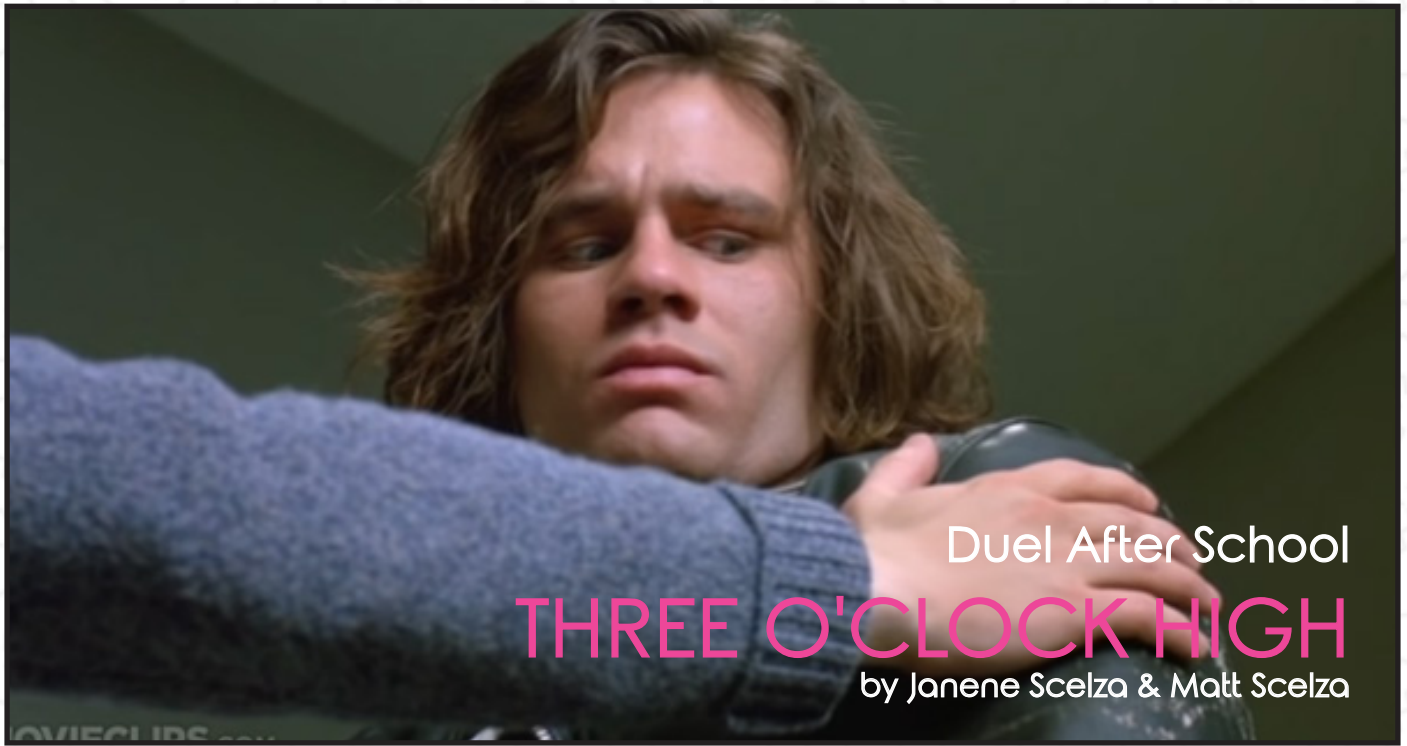
In fact, *Peggy Sue Got Married* got good reviews all around, did well at the box office, was nominated for a host of awards, and landed on a bunch of "best of" lists. I

guess I just didn't like it. Peggy Sue sets out to rid herself of Charlie without thinking of the consequences, and we all learned in *Back to the Future* (which came out the year before *Peggy Sue*) that if you change the past it will affect your future. She talks about her kids a bunch in this movie, but it doesn't really dawn on her until the very end that she should stay with Charlie for her kids' sake.

But, at that point in the movie Charlie has been the worst. He snuck into her room in the middle of the night to talk to her (but before waking her held a pillow like he was going to murder her), he basically abducted her from an outing with her grandfather (I can't even explain the grandparents scene. It was so weird you just need to watch the movie), and he was just generally an all around jerk. But, she remembers her kids and agrees to marry him again.

Okay, I get that, she doesn't want to disappear her kids. But! When she finally wakes up, back in 1985, Charlie is sitting by her bedside and insists he can't live without her, and she invites him over for dinner. What the hell? At one point in the movie the class valedictorian asks her to marry him instead and she says, "No! Peggy Sue got married. Case closed. I don't want to marry anyone." She knows she wants something different, and she knows she has to marry Charlie at least once so her kids still exist, but why, in 1985, would she still give Charlie a chance?

It was a disappointing and unsatisfying ending. I don't think I would have disliked this movie so much if Nicolas Cage hadn't sucked so hard. There were some highlights though. The supporting cast (including Joan Allen and Jim Carey) were good. The cinematography was enjoyable, and the costumes were great. So, if you decide to watch it, please at least enjoy the costumes.



Teen movies were all the rage in the 1980s. (Indeed, we had a hard time narrowing this issue down to just eight movies!). With the success of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (discussed in this issue) and a slew of John Hughes titles, Universal Pictures sought to pump money into more “teencentric” films, and particularly high school movies. Enter *Three O’Clock High*.

The thing is, though, that *Three O’Clock High* isn’t your typical teen movie. It feels more like the stylistic, oddball teen fare of the early 90s, like the *Weird Science* and *Parker Lewis Can’t Lose* TV series, for example. The movie had no big stars, and no fashionable, pretty faces. Our heroes are nerds and weirdos, but it’s not the popular kids who torment them. Neither do the prospects of romance or *gulp!* sex. And, much to Roger Ebert’s chagrin [1], there is no attempt to demystify teen angst or adolescence.

Three O’Clock High is simply a cartoonish

goofy, and at times, surprisingly violent black comedy about a hapless wimp who inadvertently pisses off the mysterious, tough new kid and is challenged to fight after school at three o’clock sharp.

Three O’Clock High pays homage to movies like Fred Zinnemann’s classic western, *High Noon*, and Martin Scorsese’s 1985 comedy, *After Hours*; films where the protagonists race against the clock to escape unintentional predicaments.

The set up happens pretty quickly in *Three O’Clock High*. “It’s just going to be one of those days,” Jerry’s sister tells him in the opening of the film. The gauntlet is thrown before first period even ends, and our unlikely hero, Jerry Mitchell (Casey Seizmasko) -- with the help of his nerdy best pal, spacey girlfriend, and witty younger sister -- spends most of the school day desperately trying to get out of having to fight crazy ass Buddy Revell (played by Richard Tyson of *Kindergarten Cop* fame).

RELEASED OCT 9, 1987 - WRITTEN BY RICHARD CHRISTIAN MATHESON & TOM SZOLLOSI - DIRECTED BY PHIL JOANOU



EVERYONE SEEMS TO KNOW ABOUT BUDDY



JERRY TRIES THE "ASK NICELY" APPROACH



NOBODY MESSES WITH THE DUKER!



THEY'RE THROUGH TALKIN...

It also happens to be Buddy's first day at Jerry's school. He comes from an alternative high school called Continuation, named such "so you can continue murdering people and still graduate on time," according to Jerry's sister. And apparently, all of the students, including Yearly Smith as a cheerleader for a hot minute, know of Buddy. He has a reputation for assaulting students and teachers alike. We don't actually know what's true and what is schoolyard fiction, so it's not a clear cut case of the Big Bad Bully kicking dirt in the nerd's face for no reason. Nonetheless, the rumor mill does get one thing right: Buddy does not like to be touched.

Richard Tyson was perfect in his film debut as the ironically named Buddy. (Honestly, everyone did a great job, even the most minor characters). Possibly taking a cue from *The Terminator*, they play up Buddy's imposing stature and psycho stare. It may also be one of the few times an actor who was clearly well past his teens, playing a teen, was meant to look his actual age [2]. Who would want to get on this dude's bad side?

Not Jerry, of course, but the teacher who runs the student paper wants to do a profile on Buddy to "make him feel more at home." She assigns Jerry the unfortunate task of interviewing him. (That the teachers don't seem too worried about Buddy suggests that the stories about his past are like the man from Nantucket's: greatly exaggerated).

The idea makes Jerry ill and sends him running for the bathroom where he also runs into Buddy. Jerry clumsily explains the project, and Buddy tells him he doesn't want people knowing about him. Relieved that Buddy's disinterest means they don't have to interact, Jerry absentmindedly pats Buddy's arm. His instant regret registers in that "Ohhh Fuddgggeee" kind of slow motion. Hence, the reason for the fight. But, at least Buddy was thoughtful enough to give Jerry time to prepare for the fight rather than rearranging his face right then?

One of the best things about *Three O'Clock High* are the visuals. This movie is basically Art Direction 101 and has an almost comic-book quality about it. The name of the game is time, and they use "trippy dutch angles, wild camera zooms, slo-mo and sped up shots, extreme closeups of clocks ticking away, overhead shots, dolly zooms on Jerry's worrying face" [3] to really make the viewer feel just as anxious as Jerry.

Barry Sonnenfeld, who directed and shot stylish hits like the *Men in Black* trilogy, the *Adams Family* movies, and some of the Coen Brothers' films, did the cinematography for *Three O'Clock High*. Writer/director Phil Joanou probably also had great visual sensibilities, having spent much of his career shooting music videos and the like for U2.

Word gets around fast about the fight. None of Jerry's classmates have any faith in his ability to defend himself, but then again, neither does Jerry. He tries increasingly crazier ways to get out of the fight, and they all hilariously backfire, including trying to plant a switchblade in Buddy's locker and paying off a jock to beat up Buddy. Even a simple attempt to go home is thwarted by the authoritarian security guard ("No one escapes the Duker!") played by Mitch Pileggi, better known as Skinner from *The X-Files* TV series. In another scene, Jerry tries to land himself in detention by doing an oral presentation on the presumably steamy *Honey Goes to Hollywood*. Instead of a punishment, he winds up seducing his teacher!

Eventually, Jerry just approaches Buddy and asks him to call off the fight. He does, but not without shaming Buddy and calling him a huge pussy (Buddy's word, not ours). "You didn't even try. How's that feel?" he asks Jerry.

This is Jerry's glorious George "hey you... get your damn hands off her" McFly moment. He got involved in this whole mess through no fault of his own. Everyone is rooting against

him. He's resorted to a lot of outrageous things throughout the day (there's some debate as to what constitutes grand larceny). And now this asshole is calling *him* a coward?! Jerry changes his mind and decides that the fight is back on.

The fight scene looks like Thunderdome. (Joanou said *Raging Bull* and *Road Warrior* served as the inspiration [4]). Seemingly every student and a few key adults encircle the combatants (including Jeffrey Tambor as the manager of the student store where Jerry works, and Phillip Baker Hall as a cop). A few brave souls try to intervene on Jerry's behalf, but it's no use. He's on his own to defeat the Final Boss, so to speak. Given the ambiguity surrounding Buddy's character, we get either the triumph of the underdog (go Jerry!), or a victory for a school that really, really seems to hate outsiders (sorry, Buddy).

Three O'Clock High was released in the fall of 1987. It was one of those theatrical flops that found a cult following via the home video circuit and cable TV. This was also another one of those movies that Steven Spielberg had a hand in getting made (he gave Joanou, a novice director, the script), served as executive producer (through his company, Amblin Entertainment), and was so disappointed with the final product that he had his name removed from the project. (See our essay on *Fandango* in the *Road Trip* Issue).

At an anniversary screening of *Three O'Clock High* a few years ago, Phil Joanou said: "I think what people were looking for was a John Hughes movie, which was very popular at the time. And what they got was a Scorsese movie, and they're like 'what the hell?!'" [4] If stylish, oddball comedies, or even just 80s high school movies outside of the John Hughes catalog are your jam, we highly recommend checking out *Three O'Clock High*.



Between 1984 and 1987, John Hughes was the king of the teen movie genre. His movies focused on the plight of suburban white kids who, no matter the conflict, usually came out on top. At the end of the decade, as American culture was starting to shift away from the conservative Regan era, we were blessed with a very non-John Hughes teen movie called *Heathers*. *Heathers* is a satiric revenge fantasy about a popular and powerful clique of high school girls, mostly named Heather, that provides dark, witty commentary not only on the teen movie genre, but also on the society in which all of these high school tropes exist.

Heathers is a violent movie with plenty of suicide imagery. Daniel Waters was only 23 when he wrote it. He said he remembered that "there were so many television shows and documentaries about the horror of teen suicide that just made it so attractive to commit suicide because you got all this love and adulation," and he saw a lot of humor in that

[1]. Waters said he wanted Stanley Kubrik to direct *Heathers*, but his attempts to contact Kubrik were unsuccessful. Instead Michael Lehman, who Waters had met through a friend, agreed to direct the movie [2].

The violence in *Heathers* made it difficult to cast. Lehmann wanted Heather Graham to play Heather Chandler, the queen bee of the Heathers. But Graham was only 16 at the time and her parents wouldn't let her do it. When Shannen Doherty came in to read for the part of Heather Duke, she took herself very seriously and didn't even want to curse. In fact, Doherty apparently didn't know it was a comedy. She cried at the premier once she realized it wasn't a serious drama. To Doherty's credit, she admits now that it might have been over her head [3].

For the role of Veronica, Winona Ryder only got the part after both Justine Bateman and Jennifer Connelly turned it down. Her agent begged her not to do it, afraid she'd never

RELEASED MARCH 31, 1989 - WRITTEN BY DANIEL WATERS - DIRECTED BY MICHAEL LEHMANN

GIRLS ON FILM: THE HIGH SCHOOL ISSUE



MONOCLES WERE ALL THE RAGE



DRAIN CLEANER COCKTAILS ARE NO JOKE



"I LOVE MY DEAD, GAY SON"



HIGH SCHOOL REALLY IS HELL

work again, but Ryder insists that she would have done it for free. "I looove this movie --to the point where I talk about it like I'm not even in it," says Ryder [4]. The production team was unsure Ryder was right for the role, but Producer Denise Di Novi now says, "She was really sophisticated intellectually. She had the beauty of Veronica. She had the intelligence. She was just the perfect anti-Heather" [5].

With their perfect anti-Heather in place, the movie was filmed over 33 days in 1988. The story revolves around a clique of four of the most popular girls in Westerburg High School: Heather Chandler (the alpha Heather) (Kim Walker), Heather Duke (Shannen Doherty), Heather McNamara (Lisanne Falk), and Veronica Sawyer (Winona Ryder). Heather Chandler is a ruthless political operative in very large shoulder pads. She knows she's at the top of the food chain, and she will ruin anyone who stands in her way.

One day during lunch, Veronica catches the eye of new kid JD (Christian Slater doing his best Jack Nicholson). JD is a bit mysterious. He wears a black trenchcoat and drives a motorcycle. When two meatheads attempt to bully him, he pulls out a gun and shoots two blanks in their direction. So, in addition to being mysterious, he's also dangerous. What teen-aged girl wouldn't like him?

Later that night, Heather Chandler forces Veronica to go to a party at nearby Remington College. When Veronica refuses to have sex with one of the college guys, Heather gives her a hard time. Veronica gets sick and pukes all over the place. Heather is pissed and threatens to destroy Veronica. Back at home, JD pops his head in Veronica's second story window (mysterious, dangerous, and creepy). This late night visit turns into a game of strip croquet after which Veronica confesses to JD that she hates Heather and wouldn't mind if she were dead.

Well, JD jumps right on board with that. They go to Heather's house to get revenge. Veronica wants to make Heather throw up by giving her a glass of milk mixed with orange juice. JD suggests a glass of drain cleaner would be better. Veronica laughs it off but accidentally grabs the wrong glass, and JD doesn't try to stop her. Heather chugs the drain cleaner and dies almost instantly. JD and Veronica stage Heather's death to look like a suicide, which sets off a series of events in this small Ohio town in which everyone becomes infatuated with suicide and the dead kids become media darlings, showered with praise. How very.

The movie eventually ends with JD attempting to blow up the entire school. However, during development, Waters changed the ending a few times. In one alternate ending, JD successfully blows up the school and all the students meet at the prom in heaven on equal social footing. Another ending had school outcast Martha Dunstock (AKA Martha Dumptruck) stabbing Veronica while calling her Heather. Veronica's dying words were, "My name's not Heather, you bitch!" [6]. Both options were deemed too violent.

Maybe because of the violence, maybe because of poor marketing, *Heathers* didn't do well in theaters. It eventually became a cult hit that, 20 years after its release, spawned a few remakes. In 2010 *Heathers* was adapted into a stage musical. In 2016, TV Land ordered a *Heathers* TV series. However, due to real-life school shootings, the premiere was delayed multiple times. Eventually, a heavily-edited first season aired on the Paramount Network over five consecutive nights. In May 2019 the network announced that there were no plans to continue the show [7].

Winona Ryder has often talked about making a sequel to the original movie. She said, "First of all, I don't know what their problem is with not wanting to make a sequel. I mean, I get that it's a special movie, and the pressure of a sequel, and it's a moment in time that you

can't recapture. But my theory was: There are *Heathers* after high school" [8]. She's right. *Heathers* don't disappear after high school, but could it really work in our current world, especially after a year of constant death and despair?

The transition between the 80s and 90s was the perfect time for *Heathers*, after the John Hughes high school fantasies but before the reality of mass shootings. *Heathers* juxtaposed the wholesome girls playing croquet with trenchcoat-wearing, homegrown American violence. There is no better example of these contrasting ideas than when Veronica tries to stop JD from blowing up the school while a pep rally goes on in the gym. Images of jumping cheerleaders and cheering students (the precursor to Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" video) are interspersed with Veronica and JD's violent struggle in the boiler room. With additional depictions of bulimia, sexual assault, and self harm presented in such a callous, self-aware manner, the movie really drives home "its disdain for the Reaganite fantasy" [9].

Waters does comment on the prescience with which he wrote about school violence. He said, "It's funny that what was kind of satirical fantasy, almost borderline science fiction, has got now the blood of reality" [10]. And it's a reality we all experience over and over again. I'm not sure a *Heathers* sequel could capture the same bleak (but funny) Gen X cynicism that it did in 1989 because we are all so desensitized to this particular brand of violence.

In her article in the *New Yorker*, Naomi Fry argues, "To watch *Heathers* as a teen-ager was to understand, maybe for the first time, that the way things are isn't the way things should be" [11]. But, we learn this lesson over and over every time we see the news. So, while I'm a huge fan of the OG *Heathers*, I think I would prefer if it remained in its pre-grunge bubble, where we can believe that it really is only satire.



Say Anything takes place in that terrifying, exhilarating summer after high school graduation. It's that time in life when we're forced to leave our old lives behind and go out into the world. Our main character, Lloyd Dobbler (John Cusack), doesn't have a plan for his future just yet. He knows he doesn't want to sell, process, or buy anything as a career. His dad wants him to join the army, but he doesn't want to work for that corporation. So, for now, Lloyd is focusing his energy on kickboxing and asking Diane Court (Lone Skye) to go out with him.

Diane is the high school valedictorian. She took college classes, and was so successful, she didn't really enjoy her time in high school. When Lloyd asks her to go to a big graduation party, she agrees because he makes her laugh, but she has to look him up in the yearbook because she's not sure who he is.

Lloyd and Diane are a strange match. Her future is planned out once she finds out she

won a fellowship to go study in London. Lloyd wants to be a kickboxer, and it seems he's a bit of an underachiever. However, Lloyd is also a really great guy. Eventually, he wins Diane over, and Diane, for the first time in her life, has some normal teenage fun. And, as she tells her dad (John Mahoney), she feels safe with him.

Diane and her dad have a very close relationship. Her parents divorced when she was young and she was forced to go to court and choose the parent she lived with. She chose her dad, who has now become her best friend (because she never had time for any other friends). As the movie goes on, it becomes apparent that Diane's dad doesn't like competing for her attention, but he also thinks Lloyd is well beneath his accomplished daughter.

Things take a turn when some IRS agents show up at Diane's house questioning her father's business practices (he runs a nursing home).

RELEASE DATED APRIL 14, 1989 - WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY CAMERON CROWE



GRADUATION MEMORIES



THIS IS A SONG ABOUT JOE



TQW YOU GET BUSTED 9OR 9RAUD



JUST WAIT 9OR THE DING

Diane eventually puts the pieces together and realizes he's been stealing from his clients for years. The stress of all this puts a strain on her relationship with Lloyd, and with her father's encouragement, she breaks up with him. Lloyd is heartbroken. His attempts to win her back are futile. As Diane's world starts to unravel, will she realize that she needs Lloyd?

Say Anything is a really great movie. Much like *Heathers*, which came out about two weeks prior, *Say Anything* bucks the John Hughes teen movie trend (but without all the sarcasm and murder). This isn't a story about the nerd chasing the cheerleader. In an article for NPR, Linda Holmes says Lloyd is "perhaps the single most human 19-year-old that the films of the '80s and '90s gave to us... He has all that doubt, but no fear. He knows what could happen, what almost has to happen; he charges ahead anyway. He's not naïve. He's simply determined in the arena of happiness and love the way other movie heroes are determined in the arenas of sports and competition" [1] or, in the case of teen movies, sex and popularity.

Lloyd surrounds himself with a supportive group of women. He lives with his sister because his dad is stationed in Germany. His two best friends are women, and he's suspicious of the guys his age. After Diane breaks up with him, Lloyd hangs out with a group of guys who like to drink behind the gas station. After listening to their advice about women, Lloyd says, "If you guys know so much about women, how come you're here at like the Gas 'n' Sip on a Saturday night completely alone drinking beers with no women anywhere?" His maturity comes through loud and clear. Frankly, it's refreshing.

Diane, on the other hand, seems unattainable because she's smart and accomplished (and very pretty), not because she's rich and popular. In fact, there's a funny clip during the party scene in which another student (Kim Faulk who was also in *Heathers*) approaches Diane and thanks her for being so

smart. She says Diane was her main competition and motivated her to do better in school. Diane, who didn't know anyone competed with her because she was oblivious to any high school behavior, tells her she's welcome.

Furthermore, Lloyd and Diane don't get together due to happenstance or strange circumstances (like Saturday detention). Lloyd just asks her out. It's all very simple and, in comparison to other 80s teen movies, somewhat grownup. His friends tell him he's just going to get hurt because she's out of his league. But Lloyd thinks it's worth taking the risk. He says he wants to get hurt. And he's very respectful of Diane's boundaries. Diane wonders if she should just focus on her work, but Lloyd convinces her they can just hang out as friends. Friends with potential.

This movie is also full of great supporting performances. Lili Taylor plays Corey, Lloyd's best friend. She's dealing with her breakup from dirtbag Joe (Loren Dean), who she is obsessed with. At the beginning of the movie, we learn that Corey tried to kill herself when Joe dumped her. At the graduation party, she tells people she wrote 63 songs about Joe and planned to play them all that night.

Joe shows up at the party and Lloyd asks him to stop messing with Corey's head (see, Lloyd's a good guy). Joe ignores Lloyd and tells Corey he still loves her (despite bringing another girl to the party) and wants to have sex with her. Corey, thankfully, walks away from him. Reminiscent of her role in *Mystic Pizza* (covered in our Food Issue), Taylor is funny, sincere, and a good friend to Lloyd. She tells him, "The world is full of guys. Be a man. Don't be a guy," which is advice Lloyd seems to take to heart.

Joan Cusack, fresh off her Oscar nomination for *Working Girl*, plays a small part as Lloyd's sister and is delightful like she is in every role she tackles. Eric Stoltz makes an appearance as Vahlere, the host of the graduation

party (he was also credited as a production assistant). Jeremy Piven plays one of Joe's meathead friends. Bebe Neuwirth, Chyna Phillips, Lianne Falk (also in *Heathers*), and Philip Baker Hall all make brief appearances. Finally, Cameron Crowe and Nancy Wilson of *Heart* (his wife at the time) have cameos [2].

Say Anything was Cameron Crowe's directorial debut. After writing *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and its follow-up, *The Wild Life*, James L. Brooks hired him to write a story about a girl who discovers that her father is a criminal. (Brooks first met Crowe while interviewing him for *Rolling Stone* during his research for *Broadcast News*). Lawrence Kasdan was supposed to direct it, but Kasdan told Crowe to direct it since Lloyd is based on Crowe's experiences [3].

In addition to being a great movie, *Say Anything* produced one of the iconic images of the 80s: Lloyd standing outside Diane's house holding the boombox playing Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes." Crowe had apparently thought about using other songs, including Billy Idol's "To Be a Lover" [4]. Once he decided on "In Your Eyes," he asked Gabriel if he could use the song. Gabriel watched the movie and said he didn't think it worked with the main character's drug overdose. What? Crowe realized that Gabriel had watched the John Belushi biopic *Wired*, starring Michael Chiklis and not *Say Anything*. Once he watched the correct movie, Gabriel let Crowe use the song [5].

If you're looking for something a bit removed from the John Hughes teen fantasies, but maybe you're not feeling the violent cynicism of *Heathers*, I highly recommend this movie. I mean, you should watch it no matter what. It's a sweet love story with characters who are all dealing with existential questions about what to do with the rest of their lives. I'm sure most of us can relate.

Endnotes

Student Bodies

Released Aug 7, 1981
 Written by Mickey Rose
 Directed by Mickey Rose & Michael Ritchie
 Essay by Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

[1] Student Bodies IMDB page,
<https://tinyurl.com/edhn5rj3>

[2] Ibid.

[3] "MICKEY ROSE'S 'STUDENT BODIES'" (New York Times, 1981) <https://tinyurl.com/8fx7c6z4>

[4] "[Video Vault] Laugh Your Head Off With Mickey Rose's Slasher Spoof STUDENT BODIES" (Nightmare on Film Street, 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/cm4s3v9s>

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Slasher send-up Student Bodies was ahead of its time, but it just wasn't funny" (AV Club, 2015) <https://tinyurl.com/upj6y9ds>

[7] History Of Dr Pepper,
<https://tinyurl.com/3yhkap9b>

Fast Times at Ridgemont High

Released Aug 13, 1982
 Written by Cameron Crowe
 Directed by Amy Heckerling
 Essay by Jessica MacLeish

[1] "Librarian of Congress Adds 25 Films to National Film Registry." (Library of Congress, 2005) <https://tinyurl.com/u67vvvp9>

[2] "Whatever: a history of teen movies." (The Guardian, 2009) <https://tinyurl.com/4t5n42bu>.

[3] "Ridgemont High." (The New York Times, 1982) <https://tinyurl.com/pyd568bk>

[4] "15 Things You Probably Didn't Know About Fast Times at Ridgemont High." (Mental Floss, 2014) <https://tinyurl.com/y8ajmyct>

[5] "Fast Times at Ridgemont High." (Chicago Sun-Times, 1982) <https://tinyurl.com/uv3jcx6c>

[6] Fast Times at Ridgemont High at Box Office Mojo, <https://tinyurl.com/hcryfmt5>

[7] "50 Best High School Movies." (Entertainment Weekly, 2006) <https://tinyurl.com/2hxx22aa>

[8] "AFI's 100 Years...100 Laughs." <https://tinyurl.com/2ur6x283>

[9] "Bravo's 100 Funniest Movies List is Laughable." (LiveManly, 2006) <https://tinyurl.com/4xtb3j9w>

Risky Business

Release Aug 5, 1983
 Written and Directed by Paul Brickman
 Essay by: Janene Scelza and Matt Scelza

[1] "Risky Business" director: "Some people like the visibility. I don't" (Salon, 2013) <https://tinyurl.com/yw8m37v9>

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[2] [VIDEO] "Risky Business Original Ending"
<https://tinyurl.com/2vynzv56>

[3] "Risky Business" director: "Some people like the visibility. I don't" (Salon, 2013)
<https://tinyurl.com/yw8m37v9>

[4] [VIDEO] "Script to Screen: Risky Business" (University of California Television, 2014)
<https://tinyurl.com/kex8ee8e>

Tuff Turf

Released Jan 11, 1985

Written by Jette Rinck (Screenplay), Greg Collins O'Neill (Story) & Murray Michaels (Story)

Directed by Fritz Kiersch

Essay by Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] "History of School Shootings in the United States" (K12Academics),
<https://tinyurl.com/2p8ahrpd>

[2] I ALSO thought there must be some truth to the daily routine and fashion of Reform School Girls (1986).

[3] "Fritz Kiersch, Director-Producer-Educator-Episode #51" (StoryBeat Podcast, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/3edcd8vu>

Kiersch is also an academic who created the film production program at Oklahoma City Community College, oversaw the development of the Department of Moving Images at Oklahoma City University, and served as Assistant VP of Academic Affairs at Point Park University in Pittsburgh.

[4] Angel (1984), Two Moon Junction (1988), Far From Home (1989) for a few beloved examples.

Peggy Sue Got Married

Released Oct 10, 1986

Written by Jerry Leichtling & Arlene Sarner
Directed by Francis Ford Coppola
Essay by Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "Nicolas Cage didn't want to make 'Peggy Sue Got Married': 'I must have said no 5 or 6 times.'" (Yahoo! Entertainment, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/vs6bz3e3>

[2] Ibid.

[3] Peggy Sue Got Married Wikipedia page,
<https://tinyurl.com/jx6kt6p6>

[4] "Nicolas Cage didn't want to make 'Peggy Sue Got Married': 'I must have said no 5 or 6 times.'" (Yahoo! Entertainment, 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/vs6bz3e3>
Peggy Sue Got Married Wikipedia page,
<https://tinyurl.com/jx6kt6p6>

[6] "Peggy Sue Got Married," (RogerEbert.com, 1986) <https://tinyurl.com/ajp4tatr>

Three O'Clock High

Released Oct 9, 1987

Written by Richard Christian Matheson & Tom Szollosi

Directed by Phil Joanou

Essay by Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

[1] "Three O'Clock High" (Roger Ebert, 1987)
<https://tinyurl.com/6dj4vwzt> -

Ebert wrote: "If there is a pathological bully in the student body, no attempt is made to understand him, sympathize with him or encourage the audience in the difficult process of empathy."

[2] Three O'Clock High IMDB Trivia,
<https://tinyurl.com/m6pk6cem>

Actors Richard Tyson and Casey Seizmasko were both 26 at the time of the film's release. Seizmasko just looked younger.

[3] "Three O'Clock High (1987) – A Review" (Haphazard Stuff, 2020)
<https://tinyurl.com/3tprje8>

[4] [VIDEO] "Three O'Clock High 25th Anniversary Q&A Parts 1-3" (Youtube)
<https://tinyurl.com/4ykbv7vd>

Heathers

Released March 31, 1989
 Written by Daniel Waters
 Directed by Michael Lehmann
 Essay by Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "Heathers: an Oral History" (Entertainment Weekly, 2014)
<https://tinyurl.com/ybdv9vzp>

[2] Heathers Wikipedia page,
<https://tinyurl.com/xpn45ths>

[3] "Heathers: an Oral History" (Entertainment Weekly, 2014)
<https://tinyurl.com/ybdv9vzp>

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "'Heathers': 30 years on – how the dark teen comedy predicted everything." (The Irish Times, 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/rfy9t4j8>

[7] Heathers Wikipedia page,
<https://tinyurl.com/xpn45ths>

[8] "Heathers: an Oral History" (Entertainment Weekly, 2014)
<https://tinyurl.com/ybdv9vzp>

[9] "Heathers Blew up the High School Comedy" (The New Yorker)
<https://tinyurl.com/w265nuye>

[10] "'Heathers': 30 years on – how the dark

teen comedy predicted everything." (The Irish Times, 2018)
<https://tinyurl.com/rfy9t4j8>

[11] Heathers Blew up the High School Comedy" (The New Yorker)
<https://tinyurl.com/w265nuye>

Say Anything

Released Apr 14, 1989
 Written & Directed by Cameron Crowe
 Essay by Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "'Say Anything' At 25: Nothing Bought, Sold Or Processed." (NPR, 2014)
<https://tinyurl.com/6kpuzr3>

[2] "5 Things You Might Not Know About 'Say Anything.'" (IndieWire, 2012)
<https://tinyurl.com/cpw75tx8>

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

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