



UNDERCLASS

The Periodical Journal of Leamington Underground Cinema

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WELCOME TO UNDERCLASS ISSUE ONE

In the unknowable, infinite quantum tangle of the fifth dimension there is a parallel universe which broke away at a tangent from our own in 1980. On a Wednesday.

On this particular Wednesday, David Lynch had lunch with George Lucas and, in a schism from our reality, accepted the offer to direct *Revenge Of The Jedi*.

The resulting motion picture was a startling conclusion to the Star Wars Trilogy. The only trailer that was shown ahead of the release featured a timelapse shot of a melting snowman followed by the one word query, 'JEDI?' strobing wildly on the screen for 30 seconds in complete silence.

By the time of the opening weekend in 1983, anticipation was at fever pitch. Fans queued days in advance and media coverage was at complete saturation.

The first audiences were immediately concerned to find that most of the principle cast had been replaced by geriatric dwarfs, covered in cobwebs. They were further surprised by a non-linear, dream-like plot seemingly concerned with the discovery of an evil mirror. It ran for 263 minutes and contained:

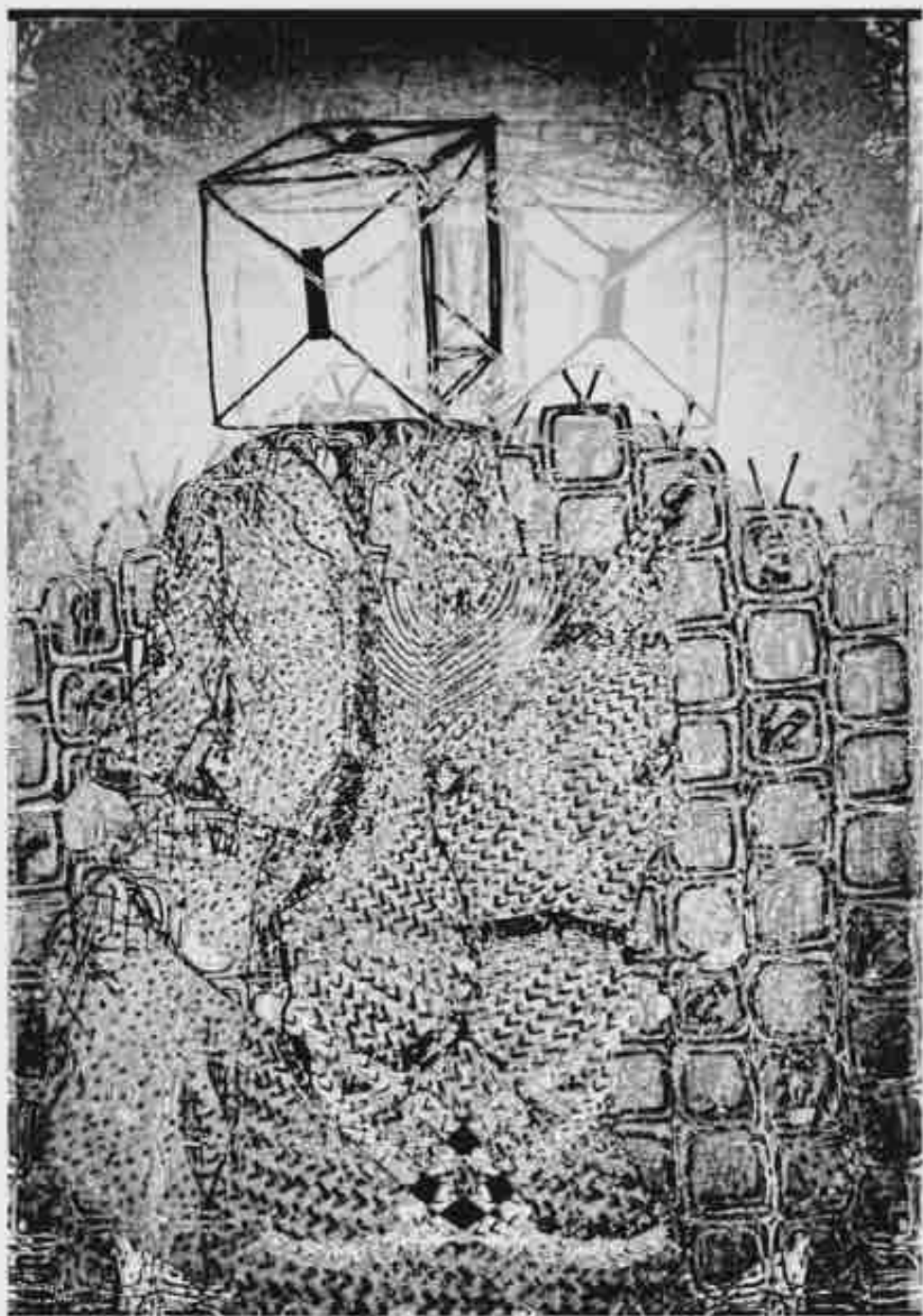
- Very few clear references to events or characters from the previous films, apart from a repeated sequence featuring Mark Hamill being wrapped in clingfilm while slurring "My Uncle Owen. He know karate. He know it real good".
- Documentary footage from an abattoir which flashed across the screen every time the word 'Force' was used.
- A soundtrack composed almost entirely of sampled wolf howls played backwards at very low speed.
- An ambiguous conclusion in which Darth Vader's head split open to reveal a small, wizened duck. The duck sang *Dream a Little Dream of Me* in a menacing baritone while a skinless Han Solo jumped backwards through a hoop of fire.

Revenge Of the Jedi played to sold out cinemas around the world for two solid years becoming the most successful and widely seen film of all time. Lucas' percentage facilitated his controversial purchase of the Vatican and appointment as Pope. Lynch retreated to a mansion in the Catskills, speaking to no-one for three years before suddenly releasing what would be considered his avant-garde masterpiece: *Basil, The Great Mouse Detective*.

1983 was a cultural landmark in the tangent universe. The film industry shifted its focus towards the surreal, challenging and experimental. As a result, previously obscure filmmakers and artists have shaped the cinematic landscape for the last 30 years: Jodorowsky got to make his 32 hour version of *Dune*, Jim Jarmusch has made the last five Bond Films and no-one has ever heard of Zack Snyder.

In the tangent universe there is no need for organisations like Leamington Underground Cinema to seek out and screen the best non-mainstream, alternative and cult movies. The words you are reading right now, were never conceived, written, printed or e-mailed.

But we don't live in that universe, so here we are.



HOW TO GET AHEAD IN ADVERTISING (1989)

DIR. BRUCE ROBINSON

"I'm an expert on tits. Tits and peanut butter. I'm also an expert drug pusher. I've been pushing drugs for 20 years."

This is an angry film. A really angry film. Produced after ten years of Thatcherism - a cinematic problem child that is clearly a product of its environment.

A searing, ranting and grotesque parable, *How To Get Ahead In Advertising* rails against the cynical consumer manipulation that underscored the wealth and dayglo excess of the 80s. In a vaguely connected manner, Bruce Robinson had done something similar in *Withnail & I*, debunking the rose-tinted nostalgia of the 60s with freezing flats and swarty alcoholics.

Withnail & I came out in 1986 and was eventually adopted by people who didn't really remember the 60s anyway. There was a cushion of time and space which allowed the audience to be more objective about the viewpoint that the film presented. In contrast, *How To Get Ahead In Advertising* was released in 1989 and critiqued the late 80s in such a savage manner that it was seen as hectoring and overly didactic.

Famously, *Withnail & I* is a film to try and drink (and possibly smoke) along to, albeit at a scaled-down level unless you are attempting a particularly colourful form of suicide.

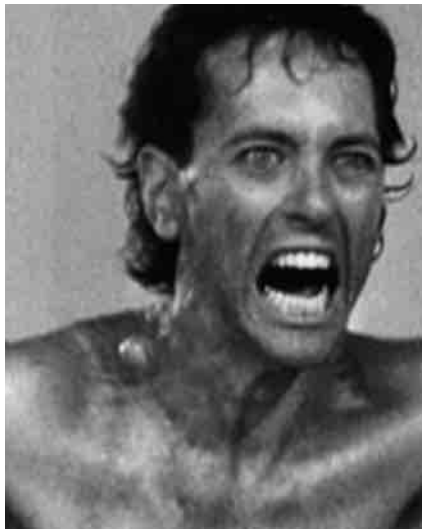
An appropriate game to play while watching *How To Get Ahead In Advertising* would be to smash a branded consumer item with a hammer every time the word 'boil' is used.

It starts as it means to go on, with sneering advertising creative, Dennis Bagley, laying out the black arts of marketing to a grim-looking meeting. Richard E. Grant as Bagley is a confident obnoxious yuppie, his contempt for the great unwashed turned all the way up to eleven.

Despite his all his previous success and outward bluster, Bagley is privately in turmoil, he can't come up with any good ideas for a new spot cream campaign. The stress turning him into a chain-smoking, martini-downing wreck and causing a nasty looking, ironic boil to appear on his neck.

Eventually our anti-hero is driven to a complete psychotic break, renouncing the evil of the advertising industry and declaring his intention to resign and do something more worthwhile.

This stretch of the plot runs strangely parallel to the 1990 Dudley Moore vehicle, *Crazy People*. However, rather than descending into a standard romantic comedy or some heart-warming, redemptive arc, *How To Get Ahead In Advertising* avoids the obvious and takes a much more daring and unusual direction. One which turns the title into a slightly ropery pun.



Bagley is checking the state of his enormous zit in the mirror, when it opens an eye and greets him “Hiya, handsome!”

From here on out there is a battle of wills between the newly reformed Bagley and the rapidly growing boil which takes on an even more extreme version of his prior personality. Eventually it begins growing a moustache, as symbolic evil boils tend to do.

No-one else believes that the boil is sentient and following psychiatric evaluation it is due to be removed. Prior to the procedure, in a nightmarish moment of body horror, the boil grows into a new head and the ‘real’ Bagley is subsumed and ultimately lanced.

Has the boil taken over? Was the more reasonable Bagley just the symptom of stress and weakness? It doesn’t really matter. The upshot is that order has been restored - but with an even more focused, evil and moustachioed Bagley triumphantly screaming his manifesto on horseback from the top of a hill.

It seems increasingly unusual to watch a film that follows through with a clear and dark hearted message to make such a stark point. That is not to say it isn’t entertaining, Robinson’s words and Grant’s delivery are just as well matched as in their previous film. Bagley may be a repellant character, but he is blessed with a fantastic turn of phrase throughout; “What do you know about God, you wire-haired Mick?” he yells at a priest from a train window.

Like all really good satire, it isn’t hard to imagine whole chunks of the perfectly formed dialogue being quoted and celebrated by by the sort of venal money grabbing bastards that it is sending up. The monumental closing monologue could probably be used as a Conservative party election broadcast in 2015 and one wonders if anyone would notice.



PUTNEY SWOPE (1969)

DIR. ROBERT DOWNEY

“Putney, I've been supervising the war toy account for 12 years. And let me tell you something: deny a young boy the right to have a toy gun, and you'll suppress his destructive urges. And he'll turn out to be a homosexual. Or worse.”

Putney Swope shares some DNA with the TV series *Mad Men*. It is set at a Madison Avenue advertising firm at the tail end of the 60s and features an unconventional but effective leading man who revolutionises the industry with new and daring ideas.

Having said that, I don't recall that Don Draper ever gazed through a smoky boardroom haze at a corpse lying on the table, while an old man screeched “HOW MANY SYLLABLES MARIO?” over and over again. More's the pity.

Title character, Putney Swope, is the sole black executive on the board of a large and successful advertising agency. When the chairman dies mid-board meeting (seemingly an influence on the Coen's *Hudsucker Proxy*) the rest of the board argue about who should take over while the body lies dead on the table.

Settling on a ballot, but knowing that they can't vote for themselves, they accidentally appoint Swope by a landslide, by all voting for the candidate they assume will be the least popular.

Chairman Swope quickly sets out his vision for the company “The changes will be minimal,” he assures the worried board, “I'm not gonna rock the boat, rocking the boat's a drag. What you do is sink the boat”.

Rebranding the agency 'Truth & Soul', Swope replaces all of the white executives with black alternatives and sets off on a relentless programme of countercultural mayhem. Refusing to do business with the evil corporate conglomerates of booze, tobacco and arms - Truth & Soul starts making bizarre, satirical adverts that are a huge hit. Demanding \$1 million a time in cash from his customers, Swope has all the cash stashed in a big, symbolic perspex box.



The film makes a clear point of subverting racial stereotypes, the Swopes are mean to their white maid and Truth & Soul employ a token white employee at the office who is paid less than everyone else. There are recurring scenes where Swope is dismissive of other white characters, such as photographer Mark Focus and the delivery boy who is constantly told to use the freight elevator. This particular character is the spitting image of Lennon murderer, Mark Chapman. A similarity which goes from creepy to downright bizarre when he pulls out a revolver and starts shooting up the place.

Throughout the film, Swope is a weird enigma, progressive one minute, then mercenary the next. He dashes around the place, accompanied by Charley Cuva's brilliant funk/soul score, being confident, decisive and weirdly contrary. It is hard to determine whether he has an overall plan that he isn't sharing with anyone, or he is just making it up as he goes along. His wardrobe changes in almost every scene, robes one minute, black panther the next. By the end he has gone full blown Fidel Castro.

His motivations become blurred and commitment is questioned as Truth & Soul becomes more successful. The agency is under pressure from the Man, in the form of big business and pint sized US President Mimeo, to sell out and conform.

There is an especially barking performance by future Huggy Bear, Antonio Fargas as 'The Arab', a critical presence who denounces Swope using the words "jive", "cat" and "jive cat" in a way that could only really happen in a year beginning with the numbers 1, 9 and 6.



The apex of Putney Swope is a screening room scene, with a montage of ads climaxing with topless stewardesses bouncing around in slow motion in the special lucky prize room of Go Lucky Airlines. "Who did that?" Swope asks accusingly, "You did, it was your idea" comes the reply, "Not bad, not bad" he decides.

His put-upon staff have had enough, with even more "jive cat"-ing from The Arab, Swope is exposed as being little different to the corrupt white board that he replaced. Stealing ideas from his young and idealistic staff and selling out to the Man, precipitating a chaotic conclusion.

It's all a ruse, Swope's purpose has been to prove that despite his corrupt machinations that the people of Truth & Soul will remain committed to their progressive ideals. They don't - and in a finale that has slight parallels with The Magic Christian, that big symbolic perspex box of money ends up providing a big symbolic demonstration of corruption and greed.

An entertaining, funny and thought-provoking film, Putney Swope is also wildly influential. The honest/satirical advertising idea has been re-used countless times and the style and tone of the film has many famous fans, most notably the similarly abbreviated PT Anderson and Louis CK.

As with How To Get Ahead In Advertising, Putney Swope is most certainly a product of its time. For all of its right-on-ness there are moments that will make a modern audience wince. For example, I suspect that in 2015 if a white director dubbed his voice over a black leading man then the internet would explode.

However, despite being as firmly rooted in 1969 as Bruce Robinson's film was in 1989, the degree to which the crazy satire of Putney Swope is still relevant and applicable today is significant.

JOIN THE DOTS PUTNEY SWOPE EDITION



UNDERCLASS WORDSEARCH
THEME: REVENGE

Find the 10 films of cold-hearted retribution and list them below...



1 _____

3 _____

5 _____

7 _____

9 _____

2 _____

4 _____

6 _____

8 _____

10 _____



ZERO EFFECT (1998)

DIR. JAKE KASDAN *by Special Guest Writer Nic Pillai*

"A few words here about following people. People know they're being followed when they turn around and see someone following them. They can't tell they're being followed if you get there first."

Even though it was only made in 1997, Zero Effect may be the great lost Sherlock Holmes film. You won't find it in Alan Barnes' otherwise comprehensive study of the great detective onscreen despite the fact that Jake Kasdan's screenplay is an exemplary adaptation (and modernisation) of Arthur Conan Doyle's first story for The Strand Magazine, A Scandal in Bohemia. For audiences unaware of the Conan Doyle connection, Zero Effect works perfectly well as a quirky PI story about the mercurial Darryl Zero (Bill Pullman), his put-upon assistant Steve Arlo (Ben Stiller), their rich client (Ryan O'Neal) and his mysterious blackmailer (Kim Dickens), and it's to Kasdan's credit that he doesn't trumpet the inheritance or make our enjoyment dependent upon arcane knowledge of the Holmes saga.



While Doyle had written two previous novels about Holmes and his friend/biographer Dr. Watson, A Scandal in Bohemia was his opportunity to reintroduce and redefine the character for the magazine market. He chose to do so by detailing Holmes' greatest failure, when underestimating a woman taught him humility (and, by implication, humanity). While Kasdan tinkers with almost every surface detail, he retains Doyle's emotional trajectory and structure. Most importantly, while other screen adaptations have tended to unconsciously reinforce Holmes' misogyny (see Steven Moffat's A Scandal in Belgravia for a textbook example), Zero Effect presents a complex world in which flawed individuals reach out, make mistakes, but are the richer for having tried.

As much as this is a Holmes film, it also fits nicely into the indie sensibility of 1990s Hollywood. Events unfold in a series of liminal spaces: airports, gymnasiums, motels and mens' rooms. The soundtrack takes in Elvis Costello, Mary Lou Lord and Nick Cave as well as Portland natives Heatmiser. Pullman and Stiller are cast against type, or perhaps cast to each others' type: Pullman manic and twitchy, Stiller cold and taut. One can easily imagine a version of the film in which Steve Arlo were played by John Cusack - this is Conan Doyle by way of Grosse Pointe Blank.

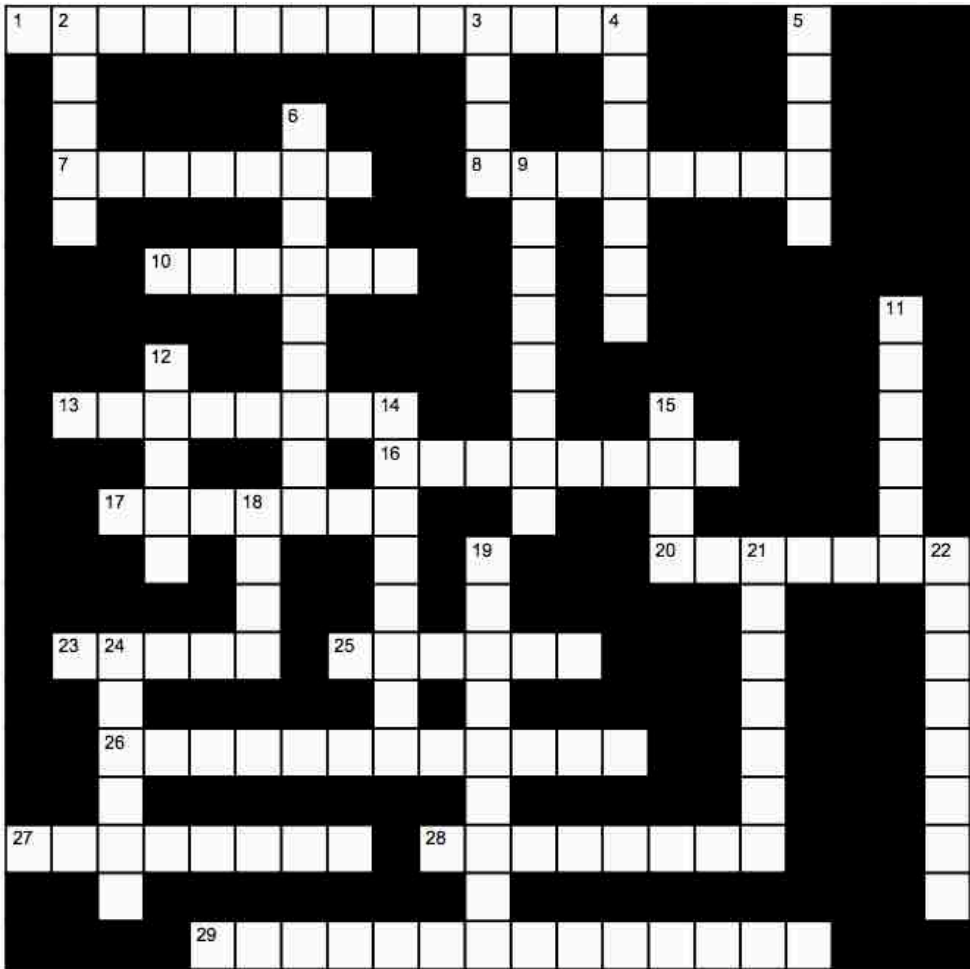
While hardly essential to viewer comprehension, the film's canonical references are deft and often very funny. There is a clever pun on 'deductions', a word used by accountants as well as detectives. Holmes' languorous violin playing of the classics becomes Zero's amphetamine-fuelled composition of awful rock ballads. And the mention of Zero and Arlo's past cases nods affectionally to Conan Doyle's apocryphal cases; no Giant Rat of Sumatra here, but rather The Case of the Man with the Mismatched Shoelaces and The Case of the Shrinking Gypsy Stripper. Pullman does a nice line in Rathbone-like disguises as well. These little touches position the film alongside a sequence of postmodern movies that used the Holmes mythos as a way of exploring emotional fragility - *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970), *They Might Be Giants* (1971) and *The Seven Per Cent Solution* (1976).



Those three films from the 70s were made as Hollywood was also establishing the conventions of the neo-noir genre. *Zero Effect* flirts with noir archetypes such as the corrupt businessman, the detective's attraction to the bad girl and the notion of an 'empty' America. Refreshingly, it also avoids the worst excesses of many neo-noirs. Gloria Sullivan (Kim Dickens), the film's Irene Adler proxy, is never reduced to a femme fatale or damsel in distress. Indeed, Dickens' performance enriches the expressive potential of the entire film, building to the extraordinary scene in a planetarium that subverts the cynicism of Chinatown. Under the stars and the watchful gaze of Zero, the film's heroine rewrites her destiny.

Given the two high-profile modernisations of the Sherlock Holmes stories currently in production, it is curious that *Zero Effect* is not more well known. Though Kasdan hoped for a sequel, it never emerged and a television pilot starring Alan Cumming was never picked up. Perhaps this is for the best. Alone with his computer, pondering the only time he took leave of his objectivity, the mysterious and brilliant Darryl Zero is the missing link between Jeremy Brett's wounded romantic and Jonny Lee Miller's pugnacious bohemian. These are interpretations that dare to show us the great heart that lay behind the great mind.

UNDERCLASS CROSSWORD
NUMBER. 1



The first person to post a picture of a complete and correct puzzle on LUC's Facebook page will win a mystery DVD (and worldwide fame).

Across

- 1 - Trippy road movie beloved by Primal Scream (9,5)
- 7 - TV version of this film had the words "Melon Farmer" dubbed over "Mother Fucker" (4,3)
- 8 - Gothic musician who frequently collaborates with director John Hillcoat (4,4)
- 10 - Before he was Robocop, he was who? (6)
- 13 - Collective name for Ash's enemies in the evil dead trilogy (8)
- 16 - If you are staying at this hotel, avoid room 237 (8)
- 17 - The actual first name of The Dude (7)
- 20 - "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore" (7)
- 23 - Wesley Snipes kills loads of vampires (5)
- 25 - Siblings appearing in Grosse Pointe Blank (6)
- 26 - In which Nicolas Cage recites the alphabet, manically (8,4)
- 27 - What links Dolph Lundgren, Thomas Jane & Ray Stevenson? (8)
- 28 - Peter Jackson's first film (3,5)
- 29 - In which Samuel L Jackson performs Stagger Lee (5,5,4)

Down

- 2 - In which Neo-Tokyo explodes (5)
- 3 - An uncle concerned with chores who ends up as a crispy corpse (4)
- 4 - Michael Mann's 1983 horror flick involving Scott Glenn (3,4)
- 5 - "SHUT UP CRIME!" (5)
- 6 - Snake (Pliskin) handler, first name John (9)
- 9 - Metaphorical meteorological phenomena from an Ang Lee film (3,5)
- 11 - If Arnie isn't Quaid, then who is he? (6)
- 12 - This 'towering' film was the third in a trilogy about death (5)
- 14 - The dark, salty drug from John Dies At The End (3,5)
- 15 - Sam Rockwell concerned about the mining of Helium-3 (4)
- 18 - According to Orson, this is what F stands for (4)
- 19 - The last decent Ridley Scott film (5,4)
- 21 - A lot of this caused in Little China by 6 down (7)
- 22 - The one where Uma Thurman plays Beatrix Kiddo (4,4)
- 24 - The annoying type of dead that like to Return, sometimes at Night (6)

THE TRIAL (1962)

DIR. ORSON WELLES

"It's true, you know. Accused men are attractive. Not that being accused makes any immediate change in a man's personal appearance. But if you've got the right eye for these things, you can pick out an accused man in the largest crowd. It's just something about them, something attractive."

There is a nice symmetry between Orson Welle's 1962 film of *The Trial* and Franz Kafka's source novel. Neither enjoyed a particularly typical development and their respective creators were ultimately fated to remain unfulfilled (to a greater or lesser extent) during their lifetime.

Franz Kafka lived a short life (he died at just forty), a doctor of law and something of an intellectual. Despite a terrible line in chat-up patter, he had quite a number of affairs with interesting young women but could not be said to have enjoyed the best of health. During his lifetime only a small number of his stories were published, following his death he left instructions for the rest of his written output to be destroyed due to what appears to be a shattering lack of confidence. However his executor, a man named Max Brod, took the step of not only preserving the works but also editing and publishing them in a series of volumes.

Out of this posthumous body of work came *The Trial*, the story of Josef K. A man placed under arrest without explanation who finds himself the subject of an arcane and impenetrable legal procedure which he is unable to escape or even fully comprehend.

The story is a stylish and mysterious satire on the nature of bureaucracy and the dangers of the totalitarian state. It has a dream-like logic, or more accurately, escalating nightmare progression to it. This may well be due to the fact that the novel was structured on a best guess basis by Brod, organising the chapters as he felt Kafka had intended. The pervading sense of unknown, shadowy forces being able to shape and control the destiny of an ordinary individual within a system or structure beyond their control is perhaps the best known characteristic of the overused term 'Kafkaesque'.



Orson Welles was a theatrical prodigy who, before he was thirty, had put the shit up a large chunk of New York with the famous radio adaption of War of the Worlds and then wrote, directed, starred in and presumably did the poster for Citizen Kane, usually pegged as the greatest movie ever made.

After this blinding start, Welles became a sort of exile from the mainstream of Hollywood film production, only popping up to do Touch of Evil in the fifties. This exclusion had many causes including his insistence on creative control, income tax trouble and the colossal catering budget any film he worked on would require. He mostly made films in Europe and did the odd bit of acting - but as he got older he became more marginalised and ended up paying the bills

by doing sherry commercials and heavy metal/prog rock voiceovers. Orson Welles ended his days as the voice of a sentient robot planet in the 1986 Transformers animated movie. Of course, everyone now bangs on about what a complete genius he was, including the people who wouldn't have given him the steam off their piss when he was doing those adverts for frozen peas.



Welles once said "I am a complete pessimist, but I'm immune to despair", the sort of person who is naturally cynical about the world around him and the people who inhabit it. Yet with the desire and confidence to give voice to such feelings rather than wallowing in them. Which is as good a reason as any for explaining why he chose to adapt The Trial for the screen.

Able to retain complete control of the project only by working within exacting constraints, Welles filmed across several countries using real locations rather than sets, often utilising abandoned buildings such as the vast Gare d'Orsay in Paris. Such seemingly guerilla film-making tactics might lead you expect some kind of ultra-real Ken Loach kind of vibe but nothing could be further from the truth. The Trial is one of the most visually astonishing films you will ever see, the film-noir cinematography marrying perfectly with the subject matter to compound the surreal, nightmare experience of the protagonist.

Anthony Perkins (as K) is constantly dwarfed by huge functional spaces, hemmed in by lines of perspective and picked out by swathes of light. As a result he appears to be the subject of an experiment, like rat in a maze being toyed with for an unknown malignant purpose. This seems entirely consistent with both the plot and style of the novel.

Welles also tried to make films of Heart of Darkness and Catch-22, neither of which saw the light of day, although he did get to play General Dreedle in Mike Nichol's film of Heller's novel and was offered the role of Kurtz in Apocalypse Now. Based on the way in which he adapted The Trial it would have been fascinating to see how those films would have turned out. I guess the difficulty is that with the level of finance and resources needed to realise such films, the level of creative control available would have been heavily compromised. With The Trial, Orson Welles was entirely his own boss and this may well be the reason that he considered it to be his finest film.

MOVIE TRIVIA TOP TEN #1

EXTREME METHOD ACTING

ONE: Bruce Willis visited a new york dog rescue centre and french-kissed an estimated 27 Dalmatians while creating the character of John McClane for Die Hard.

TWO: Alanis Morissette played the original Amiga version of Populous for 40 days and 40 nights before appearing in Kevin Smith's Dogma.

THREE: In order to perfect a scene in World War Z, Brad Pitt paid three members of the Israeli armed forces a million dollars each to let him hack their arms off with a machete.

FOUR: Benicio Del Toro fought a bloody civil war in his back garden for an unspecified number of months before filming Che. He formed a revolutionary state in his shed which, to this day, is the subject of US trade sanctions.

FIVE: For 1984's Splash, Daryl Hannah stood waist deep in a barrel of salt water for 3 hours a day and forced herself to develop a morbid phobia regarding any form of net.

SIX: To ensure a convincing performance as a Sheffield United player in When Saturday Comes, Sean Bean spent 18 months kicking anything or anyone near him as high and as hard as possible in no specific direction.

SEVEN: After winning the title role in King Arthur, Clive Owen went straight home and embedded all of his cutlery and kitchen utensils in concrete.

EIGHT: As the result of an inaccurately transcribed telephone message, Daniel Day Lewis completed a three year fine art degree using only his right foot.

NINE: Russell Brand was conceived, raised, educated and carefully manipulated throughout his entire life in a stunningly complex Jurassic Park meets The Truman Show conspiracy. This was all in order to produce exactly the right kind of person to portray the role of Aldous Snow in Forgetting Sarah Marshall and Get Him To The Greek. Now discarded by the movie studio, he is just sort of stuck like that, so has no choice but to continue in exactly the same vein.

TEN: To get the right level of intensity for his brief appearance in Apocalypse Now, Scott Glenn not only fashioned a necklace from actual human ears, but also crafted a wallet from noses and a rucksack from bum-cheeks.

DISASTER CORNER



How to survive an awkward situation,
inspired by the wisdom of the
Pierce Brosnan masterpiece,
Dante's Peak.

Pyroclastic irony

If you find yourself in a perilous situation, look for the solution in the most ironic place you can think of. Something that was dangerous before is now nothing compared to the disaster heading your way. For bonus safety, try something you already did at the beginning, before this all got out of hand.

The forcefield

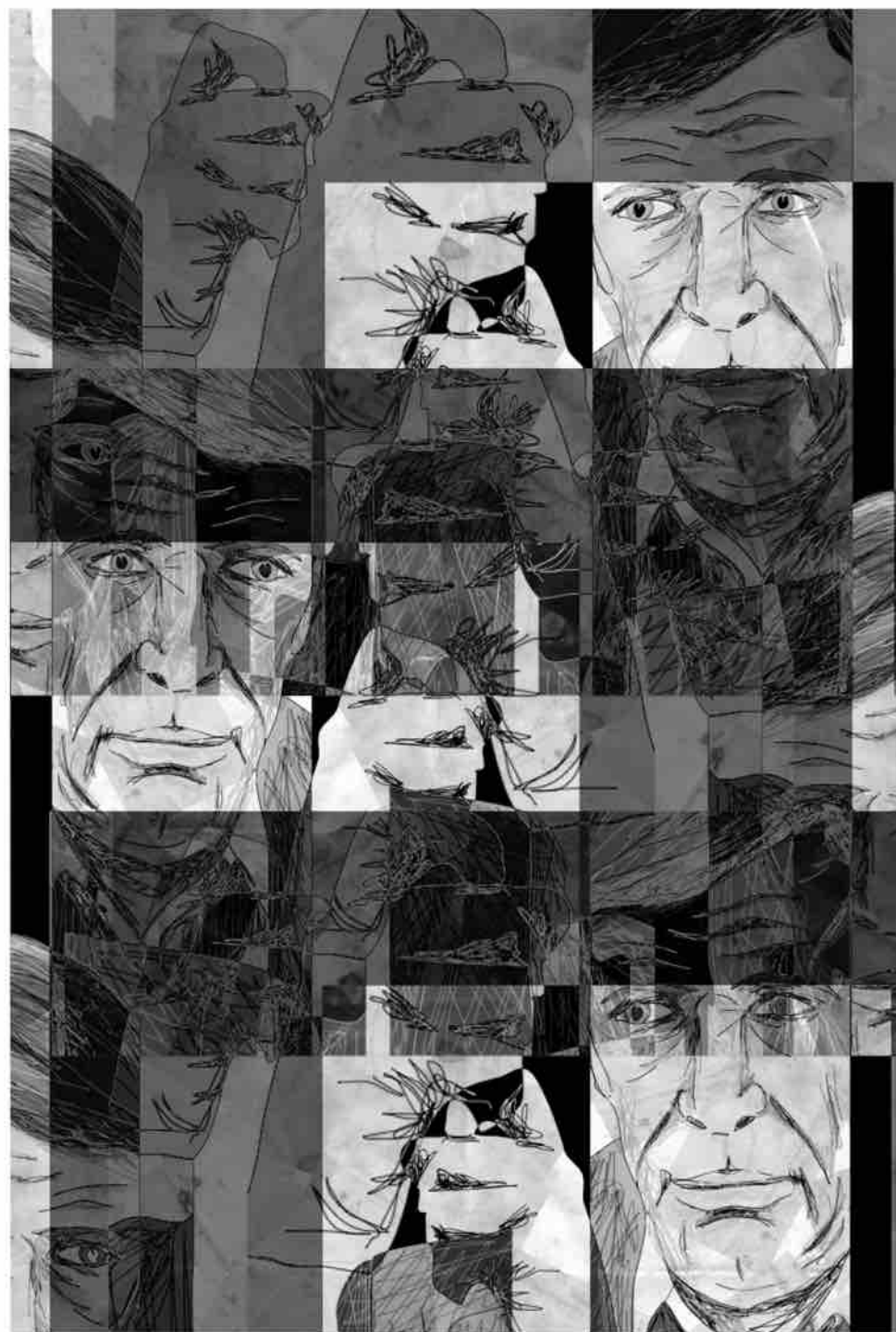
The protective forcefield generated by children can render a car temporarily lava-proof. Only attempt to drive through lava if you are sure you have genuine children onboard.

Death by I-told-you-so

Anyone who ignores advice, written or verbal, will die a terrible death. I-told-you-so-moments to watch out for include death by acid lake, non-amphibian vehicle, stampede, and that all-time classic - nude swimming. You'd be a fool not to listen to Brosnan.

The past

The past can be so cruel. When having flashbacks always try some push-ups afterwards to relieve tension. And look cool.



WINGS OF FAME (1990)

DIR. OTAKAR VOTOCEK

“You don’t know? You don’t know why you killed me? I don’t think I like having been killed for no reason, so you will think of one. Now.”

The internet has a lot to answer for. Imagine how pleasant the world would be without cyber-bullying, rampant identity fraud, terrorist atrocity videos and all of your friends pointless and ultimately depressing social media updates (“Here is a picture of me and my cat watching the #Bakeoff - #SoCrazy!”).

I’m prepared to let all of this pain, sadness and misery slide, because what the growth of the internet has also provided is the chance to identify half-remembered films that you once saw on BBC 2 following a boozy late-night return from the pub.

As long as you can remember a cast member or some vague plot point, you can now quickly establish whether some hazy recollection is an actual film, or just some drug addled fever dream about Mr T and Sean Connery battling Stalin’s ghost on an abandoned space station on a collision course with the sun.

For example, based on drunken recollections of Peter O’Toole in an afterlife based on a hierarchy of fame, some quick googling revealed that the film in question was called Hotel Zur Unsterblichkeit - alternatively known as Wings Of Fame.

Without the internet, the odds of identifying and tracking down this particular film would have been considerably reduced. It wasn’t released theatrically in the UK at all as far as I can tell and only crept onto DVD on the continent. Taking a wild punt, I ordered a German DVD version for far more than a sober person would pay and then had to wait ages for it to turn up.

Wings Of Fame stars Peter O’Toole as a famous, Peter O’Toole-ish thespian named Cesar Valentin. Colin Firth co-stars as one of those photos you used to see at the barbers. He’s a writer with the pen name Norman Elliot Tregoryn - real name: Brian Smith.

For reasons that aren’t immediately clear, Smith is desperate to speak to Valentin. Having been previously rebuffed he tries to confront him at the red carpet entrance of a 1966 European film festival. Fobbed off once more, Smith grabs a pistol from a nearby policeman and shoots Valentin dead. Before he can explain himself a falling spotlight kills him too.

Fade in on the two men crossing a Stygian river to arrive at an afterlife island resort for those still famous on earth. A luxurious hotel where the quality of your accommodation is directly related to just how well remembered you are in the land of the living.

As the famous actor and his assassin are bound together in their fame and infamy in the real world, their status in the afterlife is equivalent. Given matching suites, a most offended Valentin sets out to discover the motives of his killer while Smith learns more about the residents and rules of their new home.

As we find out more of the relationship between our protagonists, the darker side of their new home begins to reveal itself. As the guest’s fame on earth dwindles they are moved to smaller and dirtier rooms - until they are completely forgotten and are cast into the sea surrounding the island.

The resort is run by anonymous staff who wait hand and foot on the guests, but also drag them screaming from their rooms should the need arise. A regular party is held in which the continuing fame of each guest is announced in theatrical style, with the losers placed in a cage for removal. Overseeing events, the concierge is played by Walter Gotell who you will recognise from Moore-era Bond films, his second in command is the marvellous Ken Campbell.

Based around this strong central conceit, *Wings Of Fame* is both a meditation on the desire and importance of fame as well as an eerily prescient forecast of the world we find ourselves in today, where self-worth and success is increasingly determined by re-tweets, likes and views.

Is the point that it be that our earthly need for fame is consistent with the nature of the wider meta-physical universe? Or is this afterlife a special kind of hell for the well-known? The film isn't saying, maintaining a satisfying unknowable quality.

For those Hans Gruber types, with the benefits of a classical education, there are references to greek myth to absorb - such as the silent boatman, the river Styx and the hedge maze labyrinth. Film obsessives will detect the strong influence of *Last Year at Marienbad* and everyone else can try to work out who all the famous dead people are.



O'Toole and Firth are both in fine form, proving that a slightly aristocratic English accent is second to none in delivering really effective, percussive swearing. I'd rate this as near-peak O'Toole; barking self-centred demands and hurling outaged insults at almost everyone who crosses his path. It isn't as good as his turn as Eli Cash in *The Stuntman*, but it is hard to imagine that anyone could have played it better.

The detail and design of the film all contribute effectively to its purpose and atmosphere without seeming contrived or overly flashy. Smith reads the Beatles 'bigger than Jesus' story in his paper, foreshadowing his fate. We see punks arriving at the hotel desk, suggesting that time at the hotel moves much faster than in our world.

All of this good work is nearly undone in the final scene where the noises coming out of the *Outrun* arcade machine in a cafe are entirely wrong. But I'll let them off.

THE BRAVE (1997) DIR. JOHNNY DEPP

“By the way, I wouldn't leave my car out there too long. There are a lot of white people around.”

Imagine you are some kind of hollywood executive in the 1990s. Your days are made up of expensive lunches, shouting into your phone and cramming as much cocaine into yourself as humanly possible.

Your company has just funded the directorial debut of one of the most famous, yet still credible leading men. It is based on a novel by the guy who wrote Fletch, the music has been done by Iggy Pop and there is even a cameo by the legendary Marlon Brando. All this on a budget of just six million dollars. You are probably feeling pretty happy about life. Why not have some more cocaine? What could possibly go wrong?

When Johnny Depp was cast as Tonto in the recent Lone Ranger movie, there was something of a kerfuffle regarding the racial insensitivity in casting the distinctly non-native American Depp as a distinctly native American character.

What was missed at the time was that Depp has previous form in this area - although the evidence has been virtually buried for the last 18 years.

In 1997 Depp directed, co-wrote and starred in The Brave. The story of a native american named Raphael, who agrees to be tortured and murdered on screen for \$50,000. After premiering at Cannes, it disappeared almost completely - shunted out in few countries but has never been shown theatrically or released on video or DVD in the US.

The failure and disappearance of The Brave didn't seem to affect Depp's career too badly, he made a few more interesting films before his move into the big-time, island-buying, super-rich category of film star with his turn in those piss-poor pirate films.



Of course, the idea of a film so bad or bizarre, despite the presence of A list talent, that it is deliberately buried by the industry is something that is of the utmost interest to many film aficionados. The foremost example is probably the legendary *The Day The Clown Cried* starring and directed by Jerry Lewis - the tale of a circus clown in a concentration camp, described by the very few people who have seen it as "drastically wrong".

So upon watching *The Brave*, you may well be expecting a tasteless, horrendous mess of a film, but you'll be disappointed. It isn't outrageously bad, or shockingly embarrassing, but it is definitely a downer and odd - a very odd film indeed.

As mentioned, the story is based on a novel by Gregory Macdonald, who wrote the *Fletch* novels that were adapted into the eponymous Chevy Chase films in the 1980s.

Fletch and *The Brave* would make a particularly dissonant double bill - but do share the opening plot point of someone considered poor and desperate being offered a load of cash to be involved in a murder.

Depp's Raphael lives in a shanty town on the borders of a rubbish dump with his wife and two kids. As the film opens, for reasons of destitution and desperation he makes his way to a warehouse on the promise of a job.



Meeting up with a wheelchair bound Brando in what must be the only grim porn/snuff dungeon with disability access, Raphael is persuaded to be the star of a snuff film in exchange for a chunk of cash. He is given an advance and told to return in a week, the consequences of not honouring his side of the deal are made unpleasantly clear by henchman Larry, brilliantly played by Marshall Bell.

So Raphael goes about making the best of his final week, spinning a tale about a new job to his family and friends, while treating them to a big TV, crazy shopping trips and the construction of a funfair in the shanty town where he holds a big party.

One of the strangest things about this film is the self-casting of Depp in the lead role. He can't be blamed for being a handsome man, but Raphael really doesn't look like a desperate alcoholic who would let someone kill him for a few grand in a paper bag. The township rubbish dump is populated by a drunk, shuffling, goat-molesting bunch of weathered, freakish misfits, Depp stands out like a pristine thumb on a hand full of broken fingers. It's like a supermodel walking down Stoke-on-Trent high street.

The odd-ness is continued in a number of Lynch-esque scenes, such as with prospector

Frederic Forrest and his giant hamster wheel bound son. The best of the deliberately surreal material (and probably the highlight of the film) is the moment where Raphael discovers Larry taking a break while disposing of a body in the desert. For no particular reason he launches into the following monologue:

"The other day I was driving down the highway, I had the air conditioner on, I was smoking my stogies, listening to some tunes, and this big fat crow lands on a billboard. Biggest, fattest crow I ever saw in my life. Then I fix on him, and he drops dead. Boom. In the sand. Damnedest thing I ever saw. Kind of made me sick. In fact, it made me poop. It made me poop my pants. It was about a four-inch, bell-shaped fece, very hard, very firm. Things haven't been going too good for me."

From this point on, things take a turn for the messianic. Aside from the sudden presence of a priest, there is all manner of Christian imagery; Baptism, lingering shots of a bleeding hand wound and even assault by religious figurine. You half expect a roman soldier to pop up and shove a spear into Raphael's side, just to really make sure we really get the point.

To date, Depp hasn't directed anymore films and you could certainly speculate that the experience of making *The Brave* drove him away from the low-budget, arty passion projects towards the mainstream cartoonish stuff that he is now most well-known for.

In fact the point where Larry says "See you at the movies, Tonto", could have been a bold prediction rather than intimidating racism.





COLOURING IN: THE BRAVE

Please share your interpretation with us on Facebook or Twitter - best one gets a prize.

INTACTO (2001)

DIR. JUAN CARLOS FRESNADILLO

“Did you know that if you stare at the minute hand hard enough, you can see it move?”

Every time a film you really like is re-made, re-booted or re-imagined a small part of you dies. The assumption that mainstream audiences won't read subtitles or watch anything more than 30 years old is bad enough. But there is also an increasing trend to both tone and dumb-down the plots and subject matter of established classics and cult favourites.

Anyone who has seen the re-makes of Oldboy, Robocop, The Vanishing, Carrie, The Wicker Man, Get Carter, Rollerball, Abre los Ojos (Vanilla Sky), or even The Ladykillers will know exactly what I mean.

So, every year that goes by without Intacto being re-made is a pleasant surprise. On the other hand every year that goes by without Intacto being re-made makes me wonder what is wrong with the world. I'll admit its a confusing position to be in.

Intacto is an expensive Swiss watch of a film. Beautifully crafted and stately on the surface, but with all manner of complex and precise machinery whirling way below the surface to keep everything on track.

It posits the idea that some people are able to manipulate and physically absorb good fortune, leaving themselves amazingly lucky. Those that understand this gift and how it works run an underground network, where the gifted few are able to gamble their luck against each other. They compete to win the chance of taking on the luckiest man in the world, a holocaust survivor (known only as 'The Jew') who has never been beaten at his chosen game: Russian roulette with five bullets in the revolver.



[As an interesting aside, the director of this film, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo was recently involved to the remake of another story in which people with meta-physical abilities battle to become the ultimate champion: Highlander]

The story follows the Jew's exiled protege, Federico, stripped of his gift and looking for a new challenger that he can use to take his revenge. He learns of Tomas, a thief and the only survivor of a terrible plane crash. Spiriting his new charge away from his hospital bed and the police, Federico schools Tomas in the nature of his ability and enters him into a series of increasingly hazardous contests with other gifted characters.

We follow their progress through this underground culture as they try to stay one step ahead of the determined police detective who is on Tomas' trail.

The plot and nature of the film are played out slowly and deliberately with little in the way of expository dialogue to begin with. The magic realist framework that is operating behind the scenes is explained through the rituals and games that the characters engage in to improve or gamble their luck

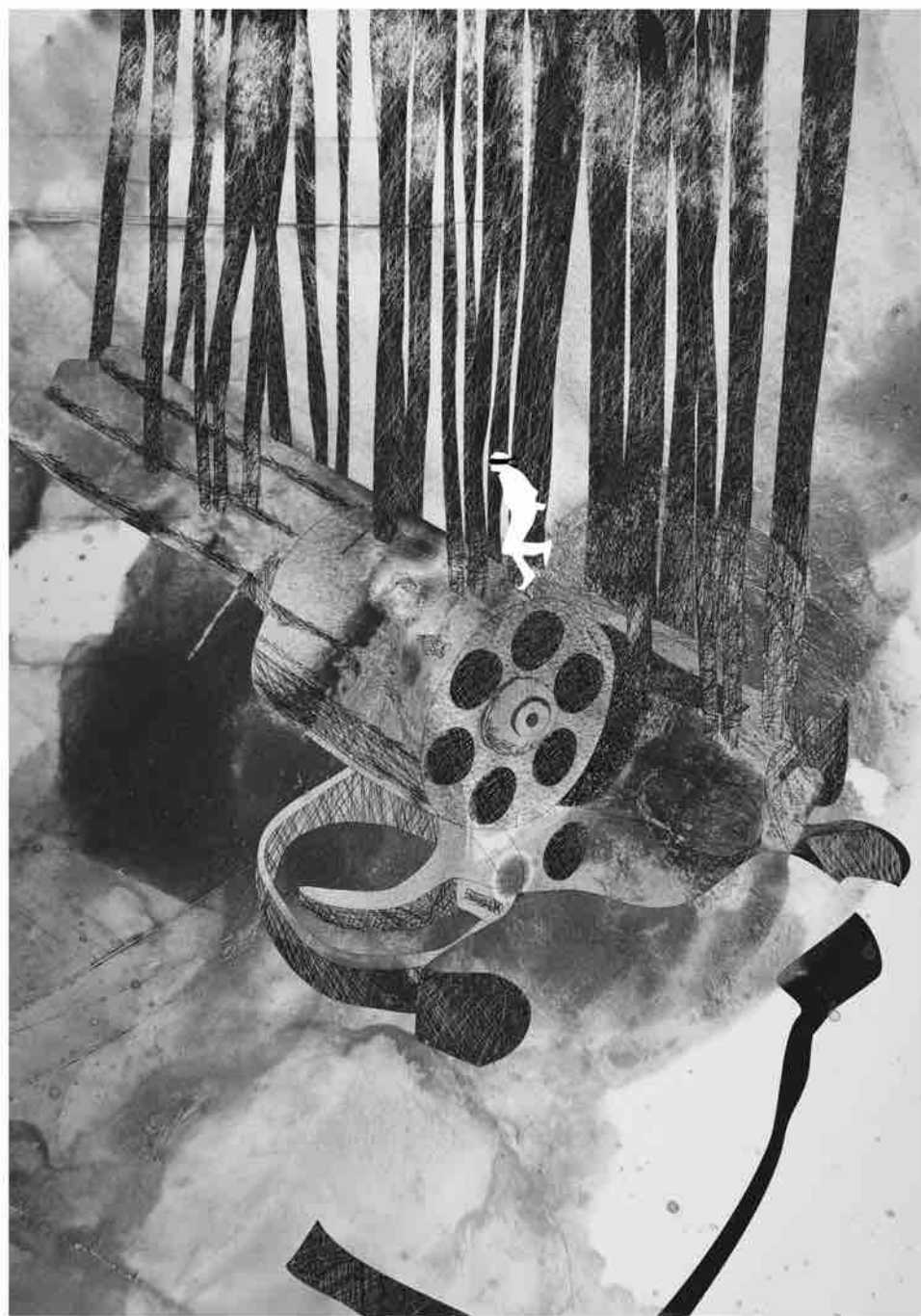
Just enough information is given out to help the viewer piece together their own theory about how luck has changed hands in the course of the film and ultimately how it affected the climax of the story.



To labour the Swiss watch analogy some more; As in Shane Caruth's *Primer* this is a film where relatively little seems to be happening on the surface, but if you could peel the screen back in a Last Action Hero manner, you would expose all the logic and causality driving the plot and fate of each character. You could definitely end up drawing diagrams about it.

In essence this is a superhero film, but a very toned-down superhero film, where the supernatural remains invisible and intangible in spite of its remarkable effects upon the fate of the characters and the plot. In that way it has a similar feel and theme to M Night Shyamalan's *Unbreakable*.

Although it hasn't yet been re-made, *Intacto* certainly seemed to have an influence over 2003's *The Cooler* and many will recognise of the most iconic scenes as it was completely lifted for the Prodigy's *Voodoo People* Remix video.



DUST DEVIL (1992)

DIR. RICHARD STANLEY

“Back in the first times, in the time of the red light, Desert Wind was a man like us. Until by mischance, he grew wings and flew like a bird. He became a hunter, and like a hawk, he flew to seek his prey.”

[IMPORTANT OPENING POINT: This article is based on the ‘Director’s Cut’ version of the film, not the 87 minute version. Make sure you get hold of the right one]

This is a film that really shouldn’t exist. Beset throughout by virtually every single problem that could occur during production it is amazing that the film was made at all and also that it is such a fine piece of work.

Director Richard Stanley was under immense pressure due to financial constraints and the associated meddling of the distributors (of the Weinstein variety) that Dust Devil should be a generic horror/slasher flick, but it is much more than that.

It isn’t a horror, though it has horrific moments. It isn’t a western, but is deliberately draws on western iconography and it isn’t a road movie, although it follows many conventions of that genre. This is a movie that refuses to fit in a conventional category and seems to have fallen between the cracks as a result.



Filmed entirely on location in Namibia, Dust Devil is an interpretation of the ‘Vanishing Hitchhiker’ folk legend (look it up, it is creepily widespread), filtered through Stanley’s unique sensibility as well as the rich landscape and history of its setting.

The Hitcher (1986) covered similar ground to great effect, with Rutger Hauer getting the Guinness gig as a result of his performance as the psychopathic John Ryder. But where that film hinted at the supernatural, Dust Devil places the occult front and centre from the very start.

The story follows a nameless hitchhiker and serial killer (Robert John Burke) - the human form of an ancient spirit who is trying to return to his own realm. The price of re-entry is a bit messy though, involving ritualistic murder and artistic dismemberment. Where things get more

complicated though, is that the killer will only take the life of someone who wants to die, the film suggests that he is drawn to them as they are drawn irresistibly to him.

Although lashings of blood and severed body parts are currency in the spirit world, in our domain they tend to attract the attention of the authorities. A world weary copper played by Zakes Mokae is soon on the trail of the killer. Although cynical about the supernatural possibilities of the case he consults the mystic proprietor of a run down cinema to discover more about the nature of the killings.

The third main character, played by Chelsea Field, is a desperate woman travelling across the desert to get away from her abusive husband. She stops to pick up the hitchhiker and falls into an ambiguous relationship with him which we know will end up with her on the wrong end of a great big knife.

After following the characters' journey through the harsh, but majestic pre-apocalyptic landscape and society of Namibia, the film climaxes in suitably mystic and violent circumstances in an abandoned mining town reclaimed by the desert. The director suggests that the very end of the film could be a preface to his previous sci-fi flick (and LUC favourite) *Hardware*.

Although you might expect a plot like that to be showcased by fast paced sequences of action, suspense and horror - what makes *Dust Devil* so worthwhile is the slow, mournful pace of the film. With a style influenced by Tarkovsky, Leone and Jodorowsky, Stanley created a film full of long takes making full use of the unique landscape and strange atmosphere of this harsh corner of the world.

While the influence of the Namibian landscape, culture and history is clear, the insufferable hardships and constraints placed on the production also played a key part.

I generally steer well clear of DVD commentary tracks - knowing how a sausage gets made can seriously impact your enjoyment of future sausages. However, I thoroughly recommend checking out Richard Stanley's fabulous monologue on the Director's Cut DVD.








As well as explaining a lot of the mysticism and imagery in the film and providing plenty of information about the shooting locations, he provides a terrifying insight into what it is like to bring a feature to the screen. As budgets were slashed, staff fired and creative control eroded, the film transformed from a more action oriented piece into a near full-on art film.








Despite this unintended upside there were clear compromises on some of the content. Links between the mystic rituals and the menstrual cycle were entirely removed and the sexual content was severely restricted. Where it was intended for the hitchhiker to run naked through the scene of a traffic accident, Stanley was forced to have him wear a modesty protecting pair of big boxer shorts - he laments: "If I could have had a multiple car pile up and a penis in the same sequence that would have really made the movie for me".








Further anecdotes make it clear that it was a minor miracle that no-one got killed while making the film and that without a skeleton crew working for nothing it would never have been completed.








Originally edited to be released at a length of 120 minutes, *Dust Devil* was the subject of a legal and literal butchering which saw it cut down to 87 minutes by Miramax. Stanley himself was able to re-acquire the film and fourteen years later it emerged as intended.

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UNDERCLASS: THE PERIODICAL JOURNAL OF LEAMINGTON UNDERGROUND CINEMA - ISSUE ONE - MARCH 2015

This first issue contains features on the movies listed below, as well as exclusive artwork, interactive entertainment opportunities and a special viewing logbook for your own completion...

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PUTNEY SWOPE (1969)
DIR. ROBERT DOWNEY

ZERO EFFECT (1998)
DIR. JAKE KASDAN *by Special Guest Writer Nic Pillai*

THE TRIAL (1962)
DIR. ORSON WELLES

WINGS OF FAME (1990)
DIR. OTAKAR VOTOCEK

THE BRAVE (1997)
DIR. JOHNNY DEPP

INTACTO (2001)
DIR. JUAN CARLOS FRESNIDILLO

DUST DEVIL (1992)
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