

ISSUE #3 | OCTOBER 2018

A ZINE ABOUT 80s MOVIES

GIRLS, ON FILM

THE LEGEND OF BILLIE JEAN

WHITE WATER SUMMER

ERNEST GOES TO CAMP

ONE CRAZY SUMMER

THE FLAMINGO KID

SUMMER SCHOOL

THE LOST BOYS

LOVERBOY

THE SUMMER ISSUE

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ONCE UPON A (SUMMER) TIME...

Welcome to the third installment of *Girls, on Film*. In each issue of this zine, we discuss a handful of 80's movies related to a particular theme. We previously covered music and sports, and now we're moving on to movies about the summer (because it was summer when we started this thing). And these movies have it all: summer camp, summer jobs, summer romance, summer rebellion, and even summer vampires! (Beware: all essays contain spoilers).

The lineup:

- **Summer School** – make me wanna Shoop.
- **Loverboy** – the Love Doctor of Beverly Hills is making house calls.
- **The Flamingo Kid** - Matt Dillon really likes silk shirts.
- **One Crazy Summer** – the waters of Nantucket are rife with animatronic sharks.
- **The Legend of Billie Jean** – sisters are doing it for themselves down in Corpus Christi.
- **Ernest Goes to Camp** - two words: Eggs Erroneous.
- **White Water Summer** – Kevin Bacon is the wilderness guide from hell.
- **The Lost Boys** – Santa Carla is crawling with goddamn, shit-sucking vampires.

The girls:

Girls, on Film is founded and edited by Stephanie McDevitt and Janene Scelza. **Stephanie** was born at the dawn of the 80s, and has great appreciation for all movies, music, and fashion that came out of this radical decade. You can find her celebrating at 80s dance parties. **Janene** has written a buttload of zines in the last 20 years. She spent much of her high school years combing dank local video stores in search of every 80s movie her hometown had to offer.

Wanna write for the zine or recommend themes/movies? thegirlsonfilmzine@gmail.com

REMEDIAL ENGLISH MASSACRE SUMMER SCHOOL (1987)

Written by Stuart Birnbaum, David Dashev, and Jeff Franklin | Directed by Carl Reiner

Essay by Stephanie McDevitt



These guys are good at looking miserable.

Summer should be a time of goofing off, laying around on the beach, and hanging out with your friends. But for some unlucky students at Ocean Front High, this summer will be every kid's worst nightmare: summer school. *Summer School* was an early high-profile movie for Mark Harmon, who had mostly done TV work up to this point. It also marks my second essay about a Mark Harmon movie ([the first was *Stealing Home*](#)). This one is pretty mindless fun and even offers a shirtless Mark Harmon roller skating on the beach.

Summer School starts with a typical last day of school montage as students clean out their lockers and turn in their books. But the day takes a turn as a small group of students find out they have failed a standardized English test and have to take remedial English over the summer. Meanwhile, the English teacher, played by director Carl Reiner, is seen winning the lottery

on a scratch off ticket. He immediately quits his job, which leaves Vice Principal Phil Gills (Robin Thomas) with no one to teach this class.

As Phil Gills (great name) runs around the parking lot trying to convince another teacher to take over the class, we see Freddy Shoop (Mark Harmon), the laid-back gym teacher who wears Hawaiian shirts, attempting to head out for a trip to Hawaii with his girlfriend, but he just can't manage to pack the car fast enough. Phil Gills corners him and threatens his upcoming tenure appointment if he doesn't teach this class. So, Shoop is stuck missing his Hawaii trip and teaching summer school.

As classes begin Shoop realizes two things: first, that his class is full of kids who have been written off as failures and goof-offs (much like Shoop), and second that no one wants to be in



Behold! Mark Harmon, *Sexiest Man Alive*, 1986.

school. So, he starts taking the class on field trips to amusement parks and petting zoos, but he eventually gets busted by Phil Gills. Phil tells him if his kids don't pass the standardized test at the end of the summer session, Shoop will not only lose his tenure, but he will lose his job.

Well, now Shoop is in a predicament. How can he possibly convince these kids to study? He comes up with the perfect plan: bribe them. He gives each student one favor in exchange for their promise that they will work hard and pass their exams. Obviously, hijinks ensue. Shoop ends up teaching one student to drive, taking another to lamaze class, and agreeing to a screening of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* during class time. As the summer wears on, the favors Shoop has to do for these kids get zanier and more intrusive and he eventually loses his cool. He storms out of class leaving the kids to deal with a substitute teacher. And I won't ruin it for you, but this results in the best scene in the movie.

After the test, Shoop is called into the principal's office and told that not all of his students passed, so he's going to get fired. However, the kids and their parents are all waiting outside to defend him, and Shoop gives an impassioned speech about how they might not have all passed, but they all made significant improvements in their scores. In the end the principal lets him keep his job (much to Phil Gills' dismay) and the kids all feel good about their academic efforts.

I'd seen *Summer School* many years ago and remember really liking it. I liked that Shoop believed in this group of kids that no one else believed in. He offers them the opportunity to express themselves in ways other teachers wouldn't. He finds different ways to teach them, like teaching how to write a letter by having them write complaint letters to companies with which they have bad experiences. He explains that they can often get free stuff this way, which is incentive enough for the kids to complete the assignment.



That cantaloupe is toast.

Also, the students are all very funny and were very well cast. Dave (Gary Riley) and Chainsaw (Dean Cameron) are two horror-movie-loving guys who love to gross everyone out every chance they get. There's Alan (Richard Steven Horvitz) the awkward nerd, Larry (Ken Olandt) the guy who sleeps through every class, Denise (Kelly Jo Minter) the girl who can't drive, and Pam (Courtney Thorne-Smith) the girl in love with Shoop. The students all give him a hard time, but they are a likeable group and definitely fun to watch.

What I didn't remember about this movie was how creepy it was. Shoop generally seems to like his students, and he obviously cares about being a gym teacher, or at the very least keeping his job. But then he does a bunch of things that should have gotten him fired, even in an 80s high school movie. First, he lets the kids throw a party

at his house. Then, when Dave and Chainsaw are caught drinking on the beach, Shoop just happens to be roller-skating by and takes the fall for them. He tells the cops they were drinking his liquor and he gets arrested, only to be bailed out by Phil Gills.

Finally, he lets Pam move in with him. His intentions were good, but Pam very obviously had a crush on him (she told him so at the house party) and he takes advantage of her (though not in a sexual way). He lets her do his laundry, cook him dinner, and talk to him like she's his wife. It was actually a pretty messed up dynamic. I guess Shoop convinced himself it was okay because if he didn't follow through on his bribes, they wouldn't work hard for the test, but still.



Perfect cover for *Summer School*, the romance novel.

In the midst of all the chaos with his students, Shoop tries to get with the history teacher, Robin (Kirstie Alley), even though she is dating Phil Gills. There is very little substance to their relationship. As Roger Ebert noted, "She and Harmon perform the basic romantic three-step from Screenwriting 101: (1) She can't stand him; (2) she learns to accept him, and (3) they fall in love. It amazes me that filmmakers will still film, and audiences will still watch, relationships so bankrupt of human feeling that the characters could be reading dialogue written by a computer."

I agree with Ebert on this point, but I also want to say that Shoop hits on Robin mercilessly

throughout the movie. He just can't take no for an answer. Also, what happened to Shoop's girlfriend? We're told that she went to Hawaii without him, and when Pam begins her failed attempt to seduce Shoop, he says he has a girlfriend, and then she is never mentioned again. At the end, as Shoop rolls around on the beach with Robin in a weird romance-novel moment that doesn't fit in this movie, the girlfriend is completely forgotten. Shoop is kind of a creep with the ladies.

Mark Harmon addressed Shoop's shortcomings in an [interview with the Chicago Tribune](#) after he was named People Magazine's sexiest man alive in 1986. He said he saw Shoop as "a living portrayal of nonsense" and had to work to find redeemable characteristics in him. "I didn't see any sense in playing a guy who is just a screw-up. I don't think people are just screw-ups, and I'm interested in playing real people." This is a tough movie to take a stance on playing "real people" because it's a ridiculous script, but good for Mark Harmon. I would say he definitely brought more to Shoop than he did to Billy from *Stealing Home*.

In 2006 Harmon gave an [interview to Entertainment Weekly](#) in which he says that *Summer School* was initially developed for Joan Rivers. I have done a bit of research and can find nothing to back up his statement, but I'd really like to know what this means. I guess Rivers was supposed to play the teacher role, and if that was the case it would have been a completely different movie.

Summer School got mixed reviews, but ended up grossing over \$35 million at the box office. It became the 32nd highest-grossing film of 1987. In 2012 Happy Madison Productions apparently bought the rights to the movie and signed up for a remake, but so far it hasn't happened.

Available on DVD or rent online.

JUST A GIGOLO LOVERBOY (1989)

Written by Robin Schiff, Tom Ropelewski, and Leslie Dixon | Directed by Joan Micklin Silver
Essay by Janene Scelza



Angry Husbands Punch Out.

Patrick Dempsey became a television heartthrob following several years as McDreamy on the immortal TV drama, *Grey's Anatomy*. In the 1980s, Dempsey frequently played the charming doofus and unwitting Casanova in romantic comedies such as *Meatballs III*, *In the Mood*, *Can't Buy Me Love*, and here in *Loverboy*, the idiotic (yet watchable) story of a pizza delivery boy turned respectable summertime gigolo.

Dempsey is Randy Bodek, a slacker college kid who takes a lot for granted. But, the school year ends with some big surprises. His live-in girlfriend, Jenny (Nancy Valen), dumps him because, after two years, he still won't tell his parents about her. (They think his roommate is a dude named Vic). Then, Randy's dad (Robert Ginty), furious about his son's shitty grades and general disinterest in school, decides to cut off his tuition.

No problem. Randy smugly brushes it off, telling his dad that he's ready to start his "real life" because how hard can it be? When he learns that real life is delivering pizzas in a goofy costume for minimum wage, he quickly changes his tune and vows to win Jenny back and save enough money to get back to school. Of course, his buddy Sal (Bernie Coulson) points out the obvious -- that even with a summer of extra shifts, there's no way he'll make enough by the end of the summer to cover tuition.

Opportunity comes knocking when Randy meets Alex (Barbara Carrera), a rich, older woman visiting from Italy. For some reason, she finds this awkward, bony kid charming and the two have a very brief, sexy tryst where Randy basically gets to live out the plot of *Pretty Woman*. Alex pampers him with expensive gifts, some much-needed style coaching, and of course, sex.



Randy, cruising through life.

When Alex informs Randy that she is going back to Italy, Randy -- who appears to be new to the concept of casual sex -- thanks for her everything, but says he's not *in love* with her. He explains his plans to rekindle his relationship with Jenny and get back to school. Alex is cool with that, and even offers to help. First, with a cash donation and then with a tip to be on the lookout for "extra anchovies." *Wink, wink!*



Extra anchovies are positively loco.

Suddenly, Señor Pizza's phone is ringing off the hook with calls from Alex's network of unhappily married, hot rich women (which one montage makes it seem are ALL the rich, married women in Southern California). They want the extra anchovies and they want Randy to deliver. (Yes, the system is not foolproof and Randy does start a striptease at one woman's house who was just ordering pizza for her kids).

Sure, Randy is living out a *Penthouse* letter to the

editor, but he's the gigolo with the heart of gold and he worries about what he's getting himself into. After all, these are married women, and he's still in love with Jenny.

Not that anything too naughty really happens anyways. Dr. Joyce Palmer (Kirstie Alley) prefers ballroom dancing. Monica Delancy (Carrie Fisher) frets about body image. Even the scenes where oversexed Kyoko (Kim Miyori) demonstrates the Karma Sutra is meant for laughs. In fact, *People Magazine* [described](#) *Loverboy* as a "sex comedy without any sex" (as well as a "romantic comedy without any romance.") Besides, at the rate these women are paying him, the Love Doctor of Beverly Hills won't have to make house calls for too long.

It's amusing to watch Randy go from adorable amateur to well-rounded lover in his attempt to deliver what these unhappily married women desire most... Fred Astaire and back massages, of course! But Randy's fairly innocuous double life proves difficult to keep up. Joyce, Monica, and Kyoko's husbands start getting suspicious and sniff the credit card paper trail all the way to Señor Pizza. *Ay dios mio!*

Randy's secrets and lies also cause a series of misunderstandings at home. His dad can't understand why his son is so happy (yet, so secretive) lately and after snooping around, concludes that Randy is gay. And that really, really bums him out.

Meanwhile, Randy's mom (Karen Black) suspects her husband is cheating on her and that really, really stresses her out. (Her doctor, one of Randy's clients, immediately prescribes extra anchovies because god forbid these any of these spouses actually talk to each other).

To top it all off, Jenny shows up to surprise Randy and runs into Randy's college nemesis,

Jory (Dylan Walsh), who threatens to unmask Doctor Love so he can have Jenny for himself. The wacky chaos all comes together at Randy's parents' anniversary party before it all neatly resolves.

Loverboy is completely idiotic male fantasy. A slacker kid woos the sophisticated older woman a rich older woman. She introduces him to her network of similarly positioned women who mostly pay him for precious companionship. And of course, he learns some valuable life lessons, and is rewarded with the girl and the money! In other words... a complete and total barf-o-rama.

The sexism and homophobia make it even worse. (That huge sigh of relief when Randy tells his dad that no, he's not gay...)

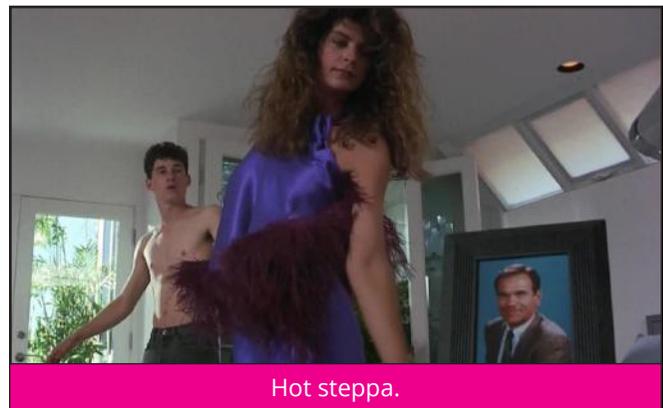
Movies that make taboo topics like prostitution and adultery endearing have been done before, and to great success. *Irma La Douce*, *Risky Business*, and *Pretty Woman*, released a year after this movie, come to mind. But, *Loverboy* seems to go out of its way to make everything way too cute, like the animated opening credits, Brian Wilson pop tracks, G-rated hijinks, and the fact that these women aren't really into sex, but merely wants someone who really "understands them."

And yet, that also makes it delightfully stupid. Patrick Dempsey, in particular, demonstrates some great comedic timing. (Check out the scene where he first meets Joyce). I especially loved fellow Señor Pizza employee, Sal. He can't believe all these women are swooning for Randy, either, though he encourages Randy to seize upon the opportunity, branding him the Love Doctor of Beverly Hills.

I also loved the brief sequence at the end with Tony (Rob Camilletti), the Italian heartthrob who plays substitute gigolo when Randy's mom orders extra anchovies. He refuses to leave her

side, declaring his love for her when she tells him she can't go through with it.

Also, this movie shares at least two connections with *Summer School* (covered in this issue): Kirstie Alley and pop singer E.G. Daily, who briefly appears as Mr. Bodek's hip, squeaky secretary. *Loverboy* wasn't much of a hit with critics nor audiences.



Hot steppa.

I imagine quite a few viewers simply stumbled across *Loverboy* while searching for movies that Patrick Dempsey did in the 80s besides the popular teen comedy, *Can't Buy Me Love*, only to find a catalog of mostly forgettable screwball comedies that only found their way into the (limited) public consciousness because they ran repeatedly on cable TV.

Critic David Nusair of Reel Film Reviews [suggested](#) that *Loverboy* would be far more cynical if remade today "There's no way a movie with this kind of a storyline -- a college kid becomes a gigolo to pay for tuition -- could be made today without the addition of American Pie-esque gross-out shenanigans." While I could see this turning into something like a raunchy Adam Levine vehicle, it is surprisingly one of the few movies we've covered in this zine where there hasn't been some conversation about remakes.

Available on DVD or rent online.

FOREIGN CARD

THE FLAMINGO KID (1984)

Written by Garry Marshall and Neal Marshall (no relation) | Directed by Garry Marshall
Essay by Stephanie McDevitt



What would an issue about summer movies be without one movie set in a country club? Well, *The Flamingo Kid* fits that bill. Garry Marshall's 1984 film stars Matt Dillon as a kid trying to escape his blue-collar roots in Brooklyn to become part of the rich crowd in Long Island. This movie could have been an exploration of economic growth and white flight from the inner cities to the suburbs, but since it's a Marshall movie, it's a lighthearted affair that focuses on a father-son relationship with some goofy bit characters thrown in for comic relief.

Set in Brooklyn in 1963, *The Flamingo Kid* follows the story of recent high school graduate Jeffrey Willis (Matt Dillon) as he struggles to decide whether or not to go to college. Jeffrey's father, Arthur (Hector Elizondo), has set him up with a summer job as an errand boy for an engineering firm, and fully expects him to attend Colum-

bia in the fall. You see, Arthur is a plumber and wants Jeffrey to both appreciate the value of hard work, but also have a better life by getting an education and an office job. But, like most teenagers, Jeffrey is out to prove that his father doesn't know anything.

After spending the day with his friends at the exclusive El Flamingo Beach Club on Long Island, Jeffrey lands a job there working as a valet. Much to his father's dismay, Jeffrey explains that he would rather park cars for the rich people at the club than work in an office. He can make more money, and he will enjoy his summer at the beach surrounded by his friends.

In addition to working his summer job, Jeffrey is also heavy into playing gin rummy. He plays with his friends when he can, but he is also intrigued by a regular gin rummy game that occurs at the

club. This game includes Phil Brody (Richard Crenna), who is not only an amazing gin player, but also an uber rich luxury car salesman and partial owner of the El Flamingo.



Luckily for Jeffrey, Phil Brody's niece, Carla (Janet Jones), takes an interest in him and invites him to dinner at Phil's mansion. Once there, Phil and Jeffrey talk about gin rummy and start to develop a friendship. Phil also decides to promote Jeffrey to cabana boy, which gives him better access to the members of the club.



As the movie progresses, Jeffrey becomes more and more enamored with Phil and with the idea of making money. Spending all of his time with Phil, the other rich club members, and his affluent friends has Jeffrey's priorities all messed up. Things come to a head when he finally tells his dad he's not going to college. Instead he's going to take Phil Brody up on an offer to sell luxury

cars at his dealership. This obviously does not sit well with Arthur, and Jeffrey ends up moving out (and by moving out I mean sleeping in the cabanas at the club).

As the summer draws to a close, Jeffrey, super excited, interrupts Phil during a dance class at the club to tell him he will accept the job. Phil, annoyed at being pulled away from his dance partner, says he will give him some crappy mail-room position. Jeffrey is obviously disappointed. Phil totally led him to believe he would have a job on the floor selling high end cars right off the bat. Jeffrey never imagined he'd have to work his way up.

On Labor Day, there is one last big gin game going down between Phil Brody and the other rich guys at the club. Jeffrey, completely disillusioned with Phil, is watching the game when he suddenly discovers Phil has been cheating at gin this whole time. One of Phil's friends would sit behind his opponent and signal which card he should throw. When Brody's accomplice collapses from the heat and injures Phil's opponent, Jeffrey steps in to finish the game, beats Phil, and exposes him as a fraud. After his victory at the club, Jeffrey joins his family for dinner and makes up with his dad. Everyone gets the ending they deserve.

The Flamingo Kid is an okay movie. It definitely has the feel of a television show, but that's because it was an early film effort from writer and director Garry Marshall. With the majority of his experience in television, it makes sense that the stakes in this movie are similar to what you would see in an 80s era sitcom. Jeffrey has very little to contend with aside from his decision to go to college and his father's disappointment. He gets the job he wants and ditches the office job his dad got for him with no consequence. He dates the rich girl and gets in good with her uncle with ease, and he gets a promotion at work all within the first half of the movie. In the end he gets revenge

on Brody by destroying his gin rummy scam and makes things right with his dad. It was all very neat and tidy.

Reviews for this movie were mixed. [Roger Ebert really liked it](#) and heaped praise on Matt Dillon's performance. Ebert stated, "Dillon has the kind of acting intelligence that allows him to play each scene for no more than that particular scene is really about; he's not trying to summarize the message in every speech. That gives him an ease, an ability to play the teenage hero as if every day were a whole summer long." Actually, in most of the reviews I read, even if the reviewers didn't like the movie, they had positive things to say about Matt Dillon.



Alfred can see through all this BS.

In addition Dillon's good work, the supporting cast of this movie was in top form. Hector Elizondo and Richard Crenna were enjoyable in the other male leads, but it was the actors in smaller roles that really won me over. Fisher Stevens played Jeffrey's friend Hawk Ganz, who always had the inside information on a good bet, and Bronson Pinchot played the ridiculous, self-involved rich guy, Alfred Schultz.

But my favorite was Jessica Walter as Phyllis Brody. Walter is always funny and plays this Long Island housewife with a perfect disregard for those who aren't of the same economic class as her family. Phyllis could be seen as a very early version of Lucille Bluth, Walter's character on *Ar-*

rested Development.

Rumors of remakes have circled around this movie for a very long time. In 2012, [Brett Ratner was said to be doing a remake for Disney](#). Music video director Nzingha Stewart was slated to write the screenplay. Stewart has directed music videos for the likes of Missy Elliott, Jay-Z, and 50 Cent. She's also directed several episodic TV series, and written a few Lifetime movies. I'm not sure how this remake would have worked. Given that the original soundtrack is composed of 60s stars like Little Richard, Martha and the Vandellas, and Dion, having a 1960's music video feel might have been cool. However, since this was supposed to happen through Disney, I imagine it would have been produced for the masses, starred whatever teen actor was hot at the time, and set in the present day with updated cultural references and cell phones.

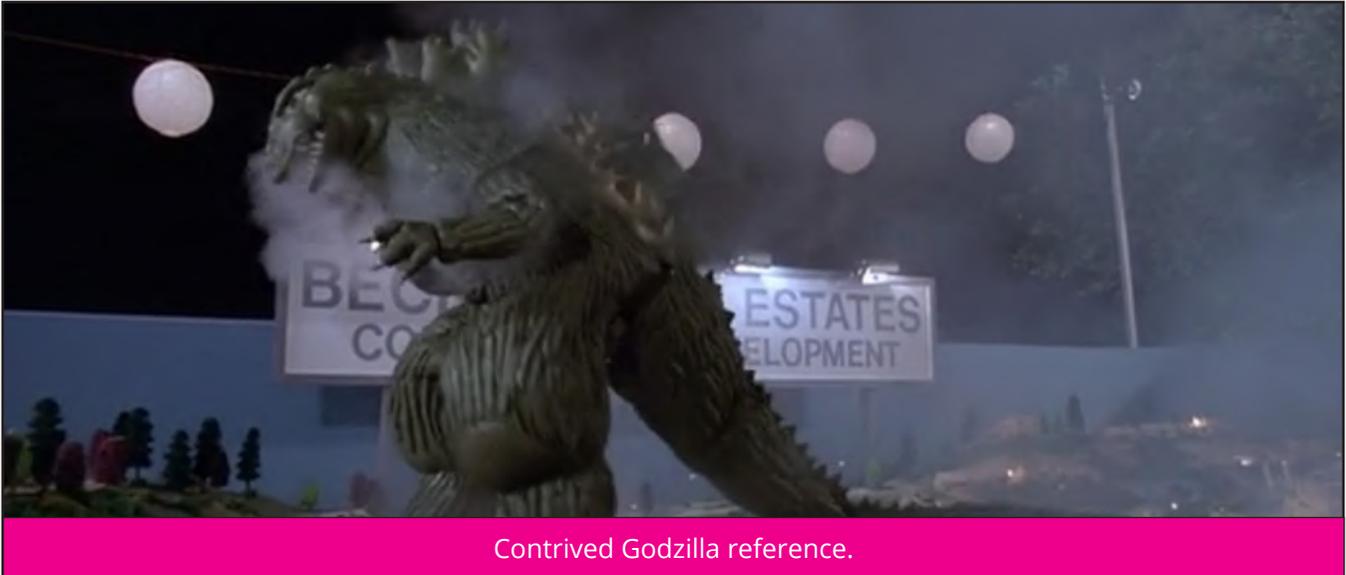
While *The Flamingo Kid* never made a reappearance on the big screen, a musical version is coming to a theater stage very soon. [The Hartford Stage](#) in Hartford, CT will host the world premiere of *The Flamingo Kid* in the spring of 2019. The description of the show on their website indicates that they have stayed true to the original time period and story line (although they changed Jeffrey's last name). If they also stayed true to the original soundtrack, this will definitely be a hit with the generation that grew up with Doo-Wop and Motown, which is probably the same generation of people that attend shows at the Hartford Stage.

I'd be pretty interested to compare the stage version to the movie version. If you happen to see it, please reach out to me and let me know how it was.

Available on DVD or rent online.

WHEN BUNNIES ATTACK ONE CRAZY SUMMER (1986)

Written and Directed by Savage Steve Holland
Essay by Stephanie McDevitt



Contrived Godzilla reference.

One Crazy Summer was one crazy movie! Ha! But really, it wasn't that good. Written and directed by Savage Steve Holland, *One Crazy Summer* follows the adventures of high school graduate and love-sick teen Hoops McCann as he tries to draw a cartoon, get the girl, save the girl's house from real estate developers, and win a sailing regatta. There is a lot going on in this movie and not all of it works. While there are a few redeeming plot points, overall it would have been better had it been less crazy.

One Crazy Summer begins with Hoops McCann (John Cusack) finishing high school and lamenting his inability to come up with a story for his scholarship assignment for the Rhode Island School of Design - draw a cartoon about love. In a series of animated clips that are interspersed throughout the movie, Hoops depicts himself as

a love sick rhino who never finds love because his personification of love is literally blind. Every time the rhino tries to find love, he gets attacked by cute and fuzzy bunnies and has to start again.

After graduation, Hoops' friend George Calamari (Joel Murray) offers to take Hoops out to Nantucket to stay with his grandmother for the summer. Hoops jumps at the chance to escape his mother, and, along with George's weird younger sister, Squid (Kristen Goelz), they set out on the drive to Nantucket.

Immediately, the boys begin their madcap adventures when, at a gas station, they encounter Cassandra (Demi Moore) who is being chased by a motorcycle gang. Hoops helps her by distracting the bikers and they all escape into George's car. Eventually we learn that Cassandra is head-



The zany group of meddling kids!

ed to Nantucket to see her sick grandfather and save his house from foreclosure.

Unfortunately for Cassandra, real estate developer Aguilla Beckersted (Mark Metcalf) is out to take control of her grandfather's property so he can build condominiums. With the help of his preppy son, Teddy (Matt Mulhern), Aguilla needs to take control of his own family's fortune to achieve his real estate dream. How can he do that, you ask? It's obvious, isn't it? Teddy has to win the regatta trophy at the end of the summer and his grandfather will pass down the money.

Hoops and George spend the summer trying to thwart the Beckersteds and help Cassandra save her house with the help of their strange group of friends. There are the Stork brothers, Clay (Tom Villard) and Egg (Bobcat Goldthwait), who are local mechanics; Ack Ack Raymond (Curtis Armstrong), who's father forces him to train for the military despite Ack Ack's pacifist tendencies; and of course, George's younger sister, Squid.

After a series of adventures and run-ins with Teddy and his group of preppy goons (including a young Jeremy Piven), it's time to face off in the regatta. Despite Agullia's best efforts to sabotage our heroes, Hoops captains the boat to victory and takes the regatta trophy. Then he tries to make a deal with Teddy, trading the trophy for the house, but Teddy's grandfather steps in and gives the house back to Cassandra. So Hoops

keeps the trophy, gets the girl, and his cartoon rhino finally finds love at last.

This movie is all over the place. There are so many different players and plot lines that it was hard keep track of at times. A good portion of the scenes are made up of visual gags and slapstick comedy, which eventually started to feel tired and overused. For example, when the boys are hanging out on the beach, George kept getting stuck under a chair occupied by a large, overweight man. It's not a funny predicament to begin with, but then it happened multiple times.

Another example comes when Egg Stork is supposed to be spying on Teddy to let Hoops know Teddy's whereabouts while Hoops is on a date with Teddy's girlfriend. Having been working security on a movie set earlier in the night, Egg tried on a dinosaur costume and got stuck it in. So, he ends up in Teddy's backyard in a dinosaur suit just as Aguilla is pitching his condo complex to Japanese businessmen. In a very predictable moment, Egg ends up trampling the architectural model in Godzilla-like fashion, much to the delight of the Japanese investors.



Hoops holds onto that trophy for dear life.

One bit I did really enjoy comes at the hands of Teddy, who spends a good deal of time in a Speedo swimming laps in his backyard pool. Almost every time we see him swimming laps, his dad is trying to talk to him about his plans for



the condos and Teddy, a big, physically fit guy, is wearing arm floaties, and yelling at his dad, "I'm doing my laps dad!" His cartoonish tantrums when his dad interrupts him were nice moments in an otherwise crowded movie.

I also enjoyed Hoops' cartoon attempts. Every time he talked about the cartoons, Holland would insert a short, animated clip, narrated by Cusack, as the bunnies crushed the love-sick rhino. These clips seemed to be forgotten in the middle of the movie, but they were a good gag, made even better by the fact that two of the bunnies were drawn to look like Jean Siskel and Roger Ebert.



According to a [review in Slant Magazine](#), Holland drew those rabbits as a response to Siskel's and Ebert's bad reviews of his previous movie, *Better Off Dead* ([covered in our second issue](#)). While the cartoon Rhino was obviously love-sick, I had

a hard time believing John Cusack as the pining teenager. Part of this was due to the script, but part of it was due to Cusack's lackluster performance.

Prior to shooting *One Crazy Summer*, Holland got the cast together for some bonding time, [which included a screening of *Better Off Dead*](#). Cusack walked out about twenty minutes into the movie and never returned. Later he told Holland how much he hated it, and he eventually just [checked out about halfway through filming of *One Crazy Summer*](#). The emotional disconnection was evident, and disappointing. I like John Cusack, and I think a better performance from him might have made this a slightly different movie.

While *One Crazy Summer* has avoided talks of a remake, in 2016 Moviehole did an [interview with Holland](#) in which he discussed a "semi-sequel." He said he's working with Bobcat Goldthwait trying to pull something together. I don't know if this is a good idea. I would assume Cusack isn't interested and I can't imagine Demi Moore would participate. Also, Tom Villard, one of the stork twins, died in 1994 and I think seeing Egg Stork without his brother would be pretty depressing. However, Holland seems to think that getting Goldthwait, Joel Murray, and Curtis Armstrong back together would be comedy gold. So, we'll see if that actually happens.

Reviews for the movie were mixed by both critics and movie-goers, but for the most part it was regarded as a mindless romp (in both good ways and bad). It actually out-earned *Better off Dead* by about 3 million dollars, but it still wasn't considered a hit. Savage has said that video stores and television broadcasts are what saved his movies. You can buy it on DVD, and there is a version that includes a feature length audio commentary by Armstrong, Goldthwait, and Holland.

Available on DVD or rent online.

BURN, BABY BURN

THE LEGEND OF BILLIE JEAN (1985)

Written by Lawrence Konner and Mark Rosenthal | Directed by Matthew Robbins

Essay by Janene Scelza



It's a do or die situation.

The Legend of Billie Jean is a surprisingly well-done 80s teen movie that unfortunately fell into utter obscurity over the years. Billie Jean Davy is an idealistic teen inadvertently turned modern-day Joan of Arc when the relatively simple matter of seeking restitution for damaged property quickly spins out of control, sending Billie Jean and her friends on the run in an attempt to clear their name. They are demonized by adults, trivialized by the media, and idolized by the young. It has a lot in common with youth-in-revolt films like *Over the Edge* and *Pump up the Volume* and, to some extent, jaded 90s black comedies like *Natural Born Killers* and *S.F.W.*

Pretty, wholesome teenager, Billie Jean (Helen Slater) and her younger brother, Binx (Christian Slater -- no relation to Helen -- in his first major film role) live in a Texas trailer park. While trying to beat the summer heat at the lake, the sib-

lings are harassed by jerkface Hubie Pyatt (Barry Tubb), who steals Binx's prized Honda Elite scooter.

Billie Jean assures Binx that Hubie will return the bike, but Binx grows impatient and runs off to get it himself. Hoping to avoid trouble, Billie Jean goes to the police, but cool-as-a-cucumber Det. Ringwald (Peter Coyote) suggests they wait a day or two to see if Hubie brings the bike back.

When Billie Jean returns home, she finds the bike smashed up and Binx beaten bloody. She, Binx, and their friend, Ophelia (Martha Gehman, who so expertly handles that big ass Buick), confront Hubie at his dad's shop and demand he pay for the bike repairs. Of course, he refuses.

Hubie's dad (Richard Bradford) offers to settle the matter, but when he gets Billie Jean alone,

he tries to force himself on her. As she flees, Binx and Ophelia show up and Binx grabs a gun from the register. Mr. Pyatt tells Hubie to call the cops, claiming the kids were trying to rob him. In a scuffle, Binx accidentally shoots Mr. Pyatt.



Found a six shooter gun.

Sure that no one will believe their side of the story, Billie Jean, Binx, Ophelia, and their other friend, Putter (Yearly Smith of *The Simpsons*), who is hoping to escape her awful mother, go into hiding. Their only hope is Det. Ringwald, who realizes that he made a big mistake when Mr. Pyatt ID's Billie Jean.

Binx savors the minor celebrity status of the outlaw life. Billie Jean meanwhile tries to keep the gang level-headed. When they learn that Mr. Pyatt was released from the hospital in good condition, Billie Jean calls Det. Ringwald to turn themselves in. But, only on the condition that Mr. Pyatt give them the money for the bike repairs.

Mr. Pyatt would rather the gang be locked up than give Billie Jean any money. Though, he happily profits from selling merchandise with Billie Jean's image on it. Det. Ringwald instead puts up his own money and makes arrangements to have Mr. Pyatt hand off the money at the mall. (Side note: the Sunrise Valley Mall is [featured in Dan Bell's depressing web series, Dead Malls](#)).

Instead of just giving the money to Billie Jean, Mr. Pyatt signals for Hubie and his goons to nab

Billie Jean. But she and the gang activate Plan B, leading everyone on a tasty chase through the mall as Billy Idol's "Rebel Yell" cues up. Local news reporters swoop in for soundbites. Young bystanders praise Billie Jean for her quick thinking while the adults appear utterly unamused.

As time goes on, the news reports about Billie Jean and the gang become increasingly distorted and outrageous (as do the crime line tips of their whereabouts). Billie Jean decides to set the record straight, addressing the public directly with the help of another teenager named Lloyd (Keith Gordon).

Inspired by a clip of *Joan of Arc* on TV, Billie Jean lops off her hair and sexes up her wardrobe to become a literal social justice warrior. The gang sends tapes to the networks of Billie Jean calling out Mr. Pyatt, adding that they'll turn themselves in when he pays for the repairs to the bike his son trashed. With fists raised, shouting her celebrated mantra, "fair is fair!"



This revolution will be televised.

By this point, things get a little crazy as Billie Jean, who shows no real interest in the limelight, is made to be this larger-than-life creature. In one awkward scene, a swarm of kids ask her to intervene when one of their own is being abused as though she's some kind of superhero. (This ain't *Supergirl*, yo!) In another scene, Billie Jean discovers a network of young female admirers who emulate her style.

In any event, the fugitive life grows both increasingly dangerous and tedious, even for Binx, and Billie Jean once again announces that they will turn themselves in on the condition that Mr. Pyatt give them the money for the bike repairs.

Lloyd convinces Billie Jean to let him pretend to be their hostage so they have some leverage when negotiating with the police. But, it actually works against them.

Lloyd's father is the District Attorney and he offers a huge reward for his son's return and orders a significant police presence, much to the chagrin of Det. Ringwald who struggles to contain the situation. Binx approaches in disguise with Chekov's toy pistol pointed at Lloyd's back. Hubie jumps out to expose him and this time, it is Binx who is shot.

Billie Jean returns to the beach that night, utterly defeated. She approaches Mr. Pyatt who is still selling her merchandise. When he sees her, he apologizes about Binx and offers her some money. Dumbfounded by the gesture, she blows up at him as the surrounding crowd watches in silence. "You said I was gonna love it" she says, referring to his sexual advances earlier in the movie. Something falls and catches fire and, harkening back to the clip of *Joan of Arc*, both the money and the merchandise go up in flames. No one attempts to help. Not even Hubie.

The Legend of Billie Jean is one of my 80s favorite movies. Sure, the premise is rather ridiculous when you consider that everything is set in motion because of a stolen bike and a few hundred dollars for the repairs. But, had the writers chosen to make the attempted rape (or similar offense) the main focus, it would have been a much darker movie. Here, there are light-hearted, funny moments. One of my favorite [bits of trivia](#) is that Yearly Smith is still approached by people who recall her solemnly delivered line, "When can I get a diaphragm?"



Merchandising! Merchandising! Merchandising!

Overall, it is a cool and witty and "competently made" B-movie (to borrow the words of film critic Janet Maslin). And the cast is superb. Richard Bradford especially plays an excellent sleazebag that it's so satisfying to watch his downfall.

[Unconfirmed trivia](#) says that Pat Benatar introduces her song, "Invincible," as being from the "worst movie ever made." No way it's anything close to the worst. Assuming the trivia is true, I can only assume it's out of bitterness for the studio's decision to scrap plans for an official soundtrack (it certainly wouldn't be the first time). But, the song was a commercial success for Benatar. The [music video](#) is also excellent (I especially loved the brocade duster and neon orange eye shadow she donned for it).

Of course, the movie was a moderate box office success (it took a long time to transition to modern home viewing formats). As of yet, there are no reported plans for a remake or a sequel. (Updates would inevitably have to include the role of toxic social media). It did, however, inspire what the [Huffington Post described as](#) a "wonderfully warped musical adaptation," performed by the Cavern Club in the basement of a Mexican restaurant in California last summer.

Available on DVD or rent online. 75% of a quality bootleg also available via DailyMotion.

THE PATH OF THE BRAVE

ERNEST GOES TO CAMP (1987)

Written by John R. Cherry III and Coke Sams | Directed by John R. Cherry III
Essay by Stephanie McDevitt



Ernest's motto is "safety first."

Ernest Goes to Camp is a super nostalgic movie for me. My siblings and I used to watch it over and over, and I still remember a good deal of the dialogue today. I was nervous the movie wouldn't hold up, but honestly, I think it does. It's a silly movie, and probably the best of all the Ernest movies. Watching Jim Varney do pratfalls and stumble around the forest definitely took me back to a simpler time when my ten-year-old self thought Ernest was the funniest character in existence.

Prior to creating his Ernest persona, Jim Varney had been living in LA doing stand up sets for the likes of Merv Griffin and Johnny Carson, and was one of the original members of the Comedy Store (along with Robin Williams). During an actor's strike, Varney moved back to Nashville where he met ad executive John Cherry III, who was looking for an actor to play a "good ole boy

character" in a series of commercials. Varney made 900 Ernest commercials for a wide variety of products over the span of four years. However, none of these ad campaigns ran at the national level.

I do not remember seeing Ernest commercials as a kid, so perhaps there were never any made for my local market. Not doing national campaigns was key though. Varney avoided over-exposure (imagine Flo from Progressive getting a movie), but put out enough material for Disney to take interest. He was signed to play Ernest in both film and television. *Ernest Goes to Camp*, written and directed by Cherry, was the first of the Ernest films.

As *Ernest Goes to Camp* opens, we learn that Ernest (Jim Varney) is the clumsy but loveable janitor at Camp Kikakee, a summer camp for boys

located on ancient Indian territory. While Ernest plunges toilets and performs handyman chores, he tells us that his dream is to one day be a camp counselor. He's memorized the camp handbook, and learned the "path of the brave" as it relates to the Indians who once lived on that land. However, Ernest can't seem to accomplish anything without getting hurt or destroying something, so how will he ever be a camp counselor?



These bad boys look cool as hell.

Ernest eventually gets his chance with a group of underprivileged kids dubbed "the last chance boys." You see, Camp Kikakee has been chosen to participate in the governor's new program where a group of boys from a state-run facility are selected to go to camp for the summer. This group of five kids has already caused a good deal of trouble at camp by getting into fights and injuring their counselor's leg. Since the camp is short-staffed, they have no choice but to assign Ernest to work with them.



Ernest is about to get attacked by ants.

Ernest takes on the task with fervor and glee. However, the boys make fun of him every chance they get. From wrapping Ernest from head to toe in gauze during a first aid attempt, to bringing him poison ivy as a get-well-gift after Ernest is attacked by badgers, they take great delight in tormenting him. And Ernest, who is so well-intentioned and naive, doesn't see it for what it is. It's hard not to feel bad for the guy, who is simply trying to do a good job.

Meanwhile, there is a mining company mining for tetracite on land adjacent to the camp. The head of the company, Sherman Krader (John Vernon), is determined to buy the land from Chief St. Cloud (Iron Eyes Cody), the land owner. Chief St. Cloud doesn't speak any English, and the only two people who can communicate with him are his granddaughter, Miss St. Cloud (Victoria Racimo), who is also the camp nurse, and Ernest.

After many failed tries to get Chief St. Cloud to sell, Krader makes one last attempt, but this time he runs into Ernest. He lies to Ernest and says he's trying to get signatures on a petition to protect the environment, so Ernest tells Chief St. Cloud to sign the papers, which gives Krader and his mining company control of the land.

Cut back to Camp Kikakee, and all of the boys are informed that the camp is set to close immediately due to the sale of the land. It must have been a logistical nightmare to send all of these kids home at the last minute. Anyway, Nurse St. Cloud figures out that Ernest must have been involved with this since he is the only other person who can communicate with her grandfather. Ernest knows he really messed up this time and promises to make things right.

The boys, who are devastated to have to return to the institution, stay in their cabin and refuse to leave. When Nurse St. Cloud finds them there and hears them speak ill of Ernest, she tells them

that Ernest is the only one who cared about them. He fought to give them a chance, and all they've done is be mean to him. Realizing she's right, the boys find Ernest and they all decide to come up with a plan to save the camp.



Teaching the boys the path of the brave.

Ernest and the campers set out to make a giant catapult that they then use to launch smoke bombs, explosive toilets, snapping turtles, and flaming arrows into the now established construction site (how they didn't kill anyone, I do not know). The miners call down to Kramer and say they have to retreat and the boys cheer with victory.



It's so satisfying to defeat The Man.

Eventually, Nurse St. Cloud shows up with a court order delaying the construction. Nurse St. Cloud is the only woman in this movie (she doesn't even get a first name), so it makes sense that she is the most level headed and takes the logical action. In the end, Ernest and the boys somehow do not get in trouble for causing mil-

lions of dollars of damage to the mining equipment, and Camp Kikakee reopens.

Reviews for this movie were middle of the road, but I think it exceeded expectations. It's definitely a kid's movie, and because of that it's pretty inoffensive and filled with sight gags and slapstick humor. But, people turned out in droves to see it. It cost \$3 million to make this movie, but it took in \$23.5 million in box office sales. It seemed the American public was in love with Ernest P. Worrell, and it assured Jim Varney would be playing Ernest for the rest of his life.

Love him or hate him, Ernest is a cultural icon. In fact, Duke University even has a [Jim Varney Collection](#) that includes Ernest advertising, movies, memorabilia, and personal photographs. [Mel Magazine did a piece on Varney](#), and by their account, he was an amazing guy, though maybe a little weird. He was a talented Shakespearean actor, he could play an [Appalachian dulcimer](#), and he collected pocket knives. He did other acting work besides Ernest including *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and the voice of Slinky Dog in the *Toy Story* movies.

It's a shame we didn't get to see Varney's range in something other than an Ernest movie. While Ernest might have been seen as a joke, it seems Varney was a talented actor and a great person to work with. He died at age 50 in 2000 after a battle with lung cancer (don't smoke, kids).

For more information on Jim Varney, follow the links in this article, or check out the book written by his nephew, Justin Lloyd, [The Importance of Being Ernest: The Life of Actor Jim Varney](#).

Find it on DVD or rent online. Quality bootlegs also available online.

GO CAMPING, THEY SAID. IT WILL BE FUN. WHITE WATER SUMMER (1987)

Written by Manya Starr and Ernest Kinoy | Directed by Jeff Bleckner
Essay by Janene Scelza



Capturing Bacon's stunt double!

White Water Summer is a really obscure Kevin Bacon movie about summer camping gone all wrong. It had all the trappings of a successful 80s movie as a sort of summer camp adventure starring a cast of teenage boys (including Sean Astin) and the amiable Bacon as their guide. While the gorgeous scenery (filmed in the wilderness of California, Canada and New Zealand) and excellent pop/rock soundtrack might whet the appetite of outdoorsy types, *White Water Summer* is a fairly aimless and ultimately forgettable B-movie.

The movie opens on this young guy, Vic (Bacon), walking around in New York City in full hiking gear. He's on his way to the Block family's apartment to try to convince teenager named Alan (Astin) to join one of the groups he leads through the mountains during the summer. (Frankly, it's the weird start to a weird movie -- Vic looks like he

was "just in the neighborhood" from Oregon or something to ask this kid to come camping. Alan is shy and nerdy and would much rather be locking lips with the girl next door whose parents are supposed to be out of town. But, his parents encourage him to go, expecting that several weeks (yes, weeks) in the mountains with a guy they hardly know and have no way of contacting will do the boy some good.

Surprise! It doesn't. This is a story told in flashback. Older, wiser Alan (also Astin) appears intermittently onscreen to narrate and he lets the audience know that he hates camping.

Cut to the opening credits, with Alan, Vic and fellow campers Chris (Matt Adler), George (KC Martel), and Mitch (Jonathan Ward) driving to their destination as Bruce Hornsby's cheerful "Western Skyline" plays. It seems like a set up



The boys patiently wait for some plot development.

for a lighthearted adventure tale. But, things get surprisingly weird.

Vic teaches the boys Wilderness Appreciation 101: some basic survival skills, some Native American folklore, and a disdain for modern technology. He also takes the boys hiking, rafting, swimming and mountain climbing.

The action sequences are very compartmentalized. First, we get several minutes of intensity as the gang crosses a rickety bridge over a gorge. Then, Vic and Alan head down some river rapids in a canoe. Later, the boys brave a heavy rain storm when they are inexplicably abandoned by Vic. Then, they go mountain climbing. And in an intense finale, they raft down more rapids.

Chris, George and Mitch are practically starstruck by Vic and seem to accomplish the tasks with relative ease. Alan... not so much.

Alan's lack of enthusiasm is evident from the start of the trip. He sort of sulks in the back of Vic's van while the rest of the boys sing back-up to his rendition of "Don't Look Back." But anything that Alan might have enjoyed about the trip is strangely vetoed by Vic. He's bothered by Alan and Mitch listening to the ballgame on the radio while the other boys are swimming. And that sort of makes sense - he wants the boys to enjoy the time outdoors without the distraction. But he also gets weirdly mad at Alan for building

a makeshift trap with branches to catch fish instead of doing it Vic's way. In fact, he's so pissed, he throws Alan's fish back and demands that he clean the ones caught by everyone else. What?!

Alan is presumably a city kid that has never spent any time "roughing it" in the great outdoors. He is also presumably the youngest of the group. But Vic for some reason expects the kid to handle some really intense situations like it ain't no thang. In one scene, for ex/ample, he and Alan take the canoe down some heavy rapids and when Alan, panicking, asks what he's supposed to do, Vic just tells him to "follow his lead."

Unfortunately, every action sequence pretty much follows the same pattern. Vic demonstrates an activity. Chris, George and Mitch do it well. Alan falters. And, Vic gets frustrated and leaves him behind to figure it out himself. While

Vic thinks all of this is going to help Alan gain some self-confidence, Alan eventually starts to worry that Vic is just doing things to scare him and hurt him. Seriously, why isn't older, wiser Alan talking about lawsuits and PTSD therapy?

The other boys aren't much help, either. They all seem weirdly starstruck by Vic, even after he strangely abandons them in the rain storm. Even Mitch, who is his closest ally, doesn't really do anything when Alan tells him that he's worried Vic might try to hurt him on Devil's Tooth.



Alan gets real with Mitch.

When they arrive at a gap in the mountain, Vic rigs up the safety ropes for everyone to swing across. He and the boys make it across, of course. But, Alan, loses his footing when he pushes off the mountain face and is left dangling by the rope. Vic calmly tries to instruct Alan to get a foothold, though he's too panicked about the thought of plummeting to his death. After a few weak attempts and pleas from the other boys for Vic to help him, Vic decides that he's going to (for a third time) leave Alan to figure it out for himself.



That'll buff right out.

Alan struggles, but soon manages to swing himself to the other side. The other boys are relieved to see him when they are reunited, but Alan is furious and they all demand that Vic take them home. But he refuses, and they flee, thinking they would find the canoe on the other side of the mountain and get away down the river.

When they finally discover the canoe, Vic again tries to stop them from leaving, but the boys charge after him, and he falls off cliff, snapping his leg in the process. Vic's psycho mountaineer days appear to be numbered.

Alan, ever the resourceful one, rigs up a system to pull Vic out the ditch to safety. The other boys go to the ranger's station for help while Alan stays behind with Vic, who lost a lot of blood in the fall. When Vic's condition worsens and there is still no sign of help, Alan takes him in the ca-

noe and they paddle down the river rapids once more. It's quite an intense scene and the water was so rough, it appeared to actually break the camera lens in one shot. By the time they reach the shore, out of breath and surprisingly, still alive, Vic apologizes to Alan and the battle of wits ends in a draw.



See? Camping does build character!

Sean Astin spoke at a conference a few years back about how production on *White Water Summer* was delayed pending a change in administrations at Columbia Pictures. The studio didn't really know what to do with the movie. The cast was called in several times to reshoot scenes or shoot new scenes, and then Astin was called back again for the narration scenes. That probably explains why the movie is all over the place, starting as this happy-go-lucky 80s cliché before making the inexplicable beeline into *Shoot to Kill* lite territory. Though John Alcott's camera work and the music shine -- Columbia should have released the soundtrack and skipped the movie -- the script is so paper thin. The characters in particular are total throwaways.

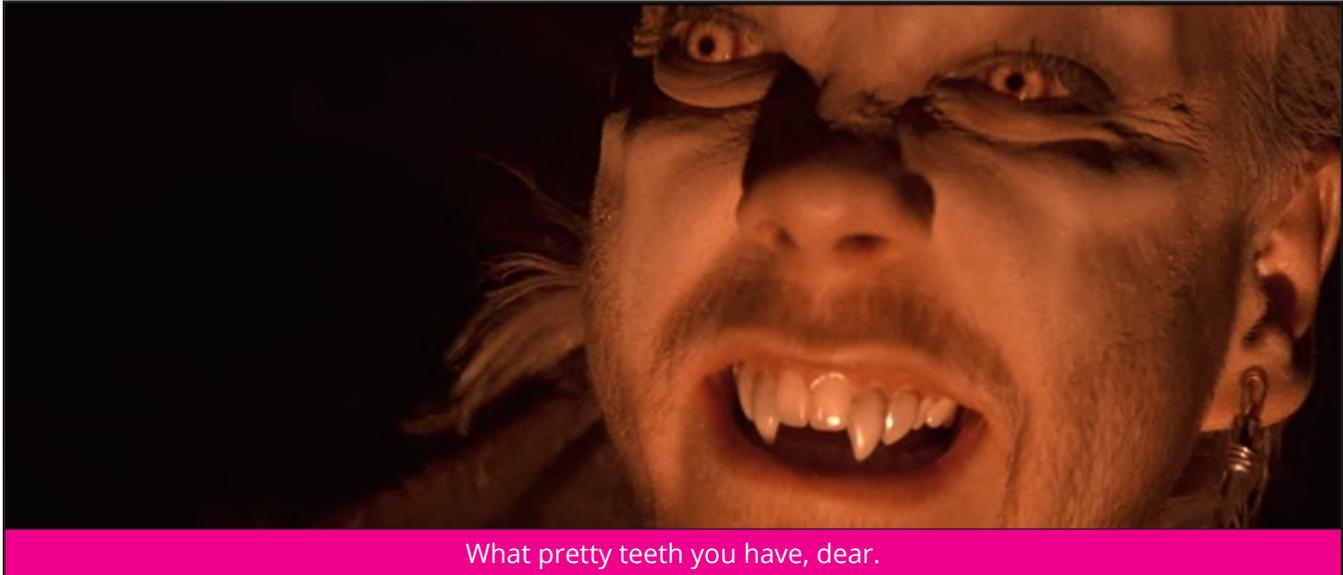
It's unclear whether the movie had any kind of theatrical release (I have read that there was limited release in the Pacific Northwest and none at all). But, in the end, it survived as bargain bin title to be run into the ground on cable TV.

Available on DVD or rent online.

THE BLOODSUCKING BRADY BUNCH

THE LOST BOYS (1987)

Written by Jan Fischer, James Jeremias, and Jeffrey Boam | Directed by Joel Schumacher
Essay by Janene Scelza



What pretty teeth you have, dear.

Joel Schumacher's *The Lost Boys* is not only set in the summer, but it's also perfectly campy fare for the season. With its gorgeous young cast (this movie introduced The Coreys much to the delight of *Tiger Beat* shareholders), meta humor, and excellent rock soundtrack, it was a vampire movie for the MTV generation.

It was also one of several 80s movies that yanked vampires from their antique coffins and brought them into the 20th century. They became French bisexuals (*The Hunger*), sexy suburbanites (*Fright Night*), voodoo priestesses (*Vamp*), obnoxious kids (*Near Dark*), and even socially awkward teenagers (*Once Bitten, My Best Friend is a Vampire*). In *The Lost Boys*, they were young leather-clad badasses and they battled equally hip teenage vampire hunters. How unfortunate that stuttering, pale glitter teens should become all the rage years later.

Newly-divorced Lucy Emerson (Dianne Wiest) and her teenage sons, Sam (Corey Haim) and Michael (Jason Patric) move to the fictional town of Santa Carla to live with their eccentric Grandpa (Bernard Hughes). The town has a lot of colorful characters, but it also has a dark side, earning it the reputation for being the Murder Capital World. (Santa Carla is based on and was filmed in Santa Cruz, which actually held the moniker in the 1970s following a string of [serial murders](#)).

But, even with all the Missing Persons flyers lining the boardwalk, no one seems too concerned about going out at night, including the Emersons, who wander toward their various fang-filled destinies. Lucy meets dorky video store proprietor and future love interest, Max (Edward Herrmann), who offers her a job at his video store after witnessing her help a lost boy find his mother.

Sam meets the snarling Frogg Brothers – Edgar (Corey Feldman) and Alan (Jamison Newlander), teenage vampire hunters moonlighting as comic book store employees who warn Sam about Santa Carla’s “little vampire problem” and educate him with a comic book/survival manual.



The Frogg Brothers scope out Sam’s civilian wardrobe.

Michael is meanwhile smitten with a gypsy girl (Jamie Gertz as Star) who leads him to a 20-something heavy metal biker gang. Their leader, David (Kiefer Sutherland), takes a shine to Michael and lures him to their hangout, a former cliffside motel destroyed in an earthquake that they share with Star and a boy named Laddie.

Michael is a cool dude, but nothing like these guys. They’re free and fearless. They’re also a bunch of “god damn, shit-sucking vampires.” And, with some sleight of hand, David tricks Michael into drinking his blood, thereby turning Michael into a vampire and making for one hell of a “How I Spent My Summer Vacation” story.



#vampirebros4life

Michael wakes up in bed the next morning with no knowledge of how he got there. Soon, his vampiric symptoms start kicking in. He levitates above his bed. He appears in the mirror as a Haunted Mansion-styled hologram. And, worst of all, he thirsts for blood.

It’s Sam who figures out that his brother is a creature of the night, and his reaction is all very little brotherly: “Boy, you wait till mom finds out, buddy!” But Michael asks him to keep it quiet, promising to fix things himself. He seeks out David for answers, while Sam consults the Frogg Brothers. They propose the easiest solution: a classic stake through the heart. But Sam insists that Michael is only half-vampire and refers to a passage in the comic book that says killing the head vampire will restore all half-vampires to normal.

Half-vampires are the ones that haven’t yet made their first kill, like Star, Michael, and Laddie. The problem is no one knows who the head vampire is. Michael suspects David. But, Sam suspects Max, since everything started around the time their mother went to work for him. He also points to Max’s nocturnal work schedule and other strange behaviors.

The boys put Sam’s theory to the test when Lucy invites Max to dinner, but they fail hilariously. He has no reaction to eating garlic that he thought was grated cheese or being doused with holy water when someone knocks over his glass. And his reflection appears in the mirror they shove in his face.

With David still a possibility (because the vampire population is so small, the head vampire has to be only someone they know), the guys turn their attention to David. Michael leads them to the gang’s underground lair, which they realize is giant coffin. But, since they go in the middle of the day, they expect the bloodsuckers to be easy targets. When Sam, Edgar, and Alan stab

vampire Bill S. Preston, Esq. (Alex Winter as Marko) it causes a very messy freakout.

One thing I love about the silliness of this movie is how insanely messy vampire hunting can be. That shit is not coming out of your clothes.

The other vampires wake in the chaos, but everyone, as well as Star and Laddie, escape just in time. Cue the Kevin McCallister-styled montage as the boys prepare for the final showdown. One-by-one, David's gang meets their maker with the classic bathtub full of garlic and holy water, literal death by stereo, and finally, the taxidermy special.



Lucy and Max show up afterwards to find the house absolutely trashed. Max starts muttering something about boys needing a mother before turning around to reveal that he, too, is a vampire. (Edward Hermann sticking out his tongue out of his vampire teeth is one of my favorite shots).

You see, Max isn't just the head of the vampires. He is the patriarchal head of the vampires. And he was planning to recruit Sam and Michael into his vampire clan, leaving Lucy no choice but to join his bloodsucking Brady Bunch. (Check out Brandon Tensley's [article](#) on the movie's sub-text related to pop culture's push for the nuclear family in a paranoid decade).

The movie's title is an obvious reference to the young characters in *Peter Pan* that, much like vampires, never grew old. The connections to JM Barrie's novel were more apparent in earlier versions of the script where Jan Fischer and James Jeremias envisioned 13 and 14 year-old vampires and even younger vampire hunters. *Goonies* director, Richard Donner, was initially attached to the project, but left to do *Lethal Weapon*. When Joel Schumacher took over as director, he lobbied for older characters, preferring a vampire story with some sex appeal.

It certainly worked. The movie opened at #2 in its first weekend. In comparison, Kathryn Bigelow's *Near Dark*, a far gloomier vampire movie with a similar plot and themes, released almost unnoticed the same year. (See the [Maven of the Eventide's excellent video](#) comparing the two).

The only problem is that Schumacher's changes to the script ultimately undermined the big plot twist. For one thing, Max's "boys" are 20-something heavy metal dudes who don't seem to have any problem with the vampire lifestyle. It's strange that they would even have a paternal custodian, much less a need for a sweet, goofy mom like Lucy. It would have made more sense for Star and Laddie, but again, that's because they're young characters. (That would add some weird Marsha-Greg sexual tension between Star and Michael!).

I'm also really disappointed that the first thing Michael wanted to do when he discovered he was a vampire was to reverse the curse rather than experiment with his new vampiric powers. I also wish there was an alternative version of the film where Grandpa comes home and, after seeing his house is a complete wreck, starts laughing maniacally ala *License to Drive*. Nonetheless, the movie remains an 80s classic.

Find it on Netflix, DVD, or rent online.

WINTER IS COMING!
(AND SO IS OUR NEXT ISSUE).

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