



2. I pass by a TCBY on the way to work. It is, of course, a yogurt stand. That is their entire stock and trade, yogurt. They seem to be having a sale on their "Southern Sundae." There is something I can't quite put my finger on that is wrong with this picture. I mean, I just don't associate yogurt as really a Southern sort of thing. I suppose that is what TV commercials are for, to make us accept images that would otherwise seem odd to us. I guess what I would need is to see some sort of Southun Genelman in a white suit and Panama hat sitting in a wooden rocking chair fanning himself and telling the camera how "in the old days people would just sit on the back porch. It would be too hot to rock, but it was never too hot to have a mess of my Mama's frozen yogurt." Nope, that isn't doing it for me. How about a plantation scene? "Miz Scarlett, you better eat 'afore you go to the picnic. Young men don't like to see a young woman eatin' up all the frozen yogurt." "Oh, fiddle-dee-dee!" Of course, it wan't long before the War come an' it wan't long before Miss Scarlett was saying, "As God is my witness, I'll never eat Tofuti again."

I just can't imagine what it would take to make a sundae southern style. You put a mint julep sauce over it? Maybe you add a few pecans. That doesn't seem sufficient. An I am sure the law would not let TCBY douse their yogurt in Bourbon. I can't imagine yogurt in the old South.

Now come to think of it, I don't remember there being a whole lot of yogurt around even when I was a kid. Perhaps I am dating myself, but when I was a kid nobody ever ate yogurt. Perhaps ice cream or the like. Hey, wait a second. I remember people eating hamburgers and hot dogs without bean sprouts. I am not talking about just kids here. Honest to gosh, now that I think of it, you used to see grown adults eating hot dogs. And they ate steak and potatoes. My mother even used to make barbecued ribs. That must have been before we all knew better. But my parents used to eat

that stuff as adults. Jeez, it just occurred to me they ate that stuff when they were my age and they never worried about their health. They never talked about worrying about their health, anyway. I worry about my health all the time. My parents never did and they are still around. I even have a grandmother who is still around. She didn't worry about that stuff and she is just a couple years shy of the century mark. And what do I eat? Stir-fried mushrooms and cabbage, squash casserole, and lentils! I ride an exercycle 80 miles a week. My father never did that until he was much older than I am now. He's still kicking. Maybe I am going to go have one of those Southern Sundaes. Maybe I am going to go have a hot fudge sundae. Then again, maybe I better not.  
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### 3. WATERWORLD (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: There is too much action and not enough excitement in this retread of too many cheap post-holocaust films. WATERWORLD was made with far more budget than business sense. In the new Universal release oceans have long since risen to cover the land. With all the engaging survival problems that would create, this film concentrates on that of fighting off nasty pirates. This is the most expensive minor film since (and including) HEAVEN'S GATE. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4)

In 1989, when there seemed to be no end of films about psychotics terrorizing people, one such film was made that really stood out. Phillip Noyce made DEAD CALM which set the same basic plot on water. A seaman and his wife are menaced when they rescue a stranger from a sinking yacht. The seaman finds himself having to salvage the sinking boat and use it to pursue his own boat to save his wife. DEAD CALM was interesting on an intellectual level as well as being a nail-biter because the seamanship aspect added a whole new dimension. Done right a tired plot can be given new life

by setting it on water and by having it be about more than just a cliched situation. DEAD CALM did it right. WATERWORLD did it wrong. For a long time after the success of MAD MAX 2 (a.k.a. THE ROAD WARRIOR) there were no end of films--mostly on cable--about lawless post-holocaust worlds where good people have to fight against roving bands of nasties against a backdrop of deteriorating conditions. WATERWORLD takes that tired, overused plot and moves it to the water where it becomes a tired, over-used plot on water. There is not very much about seamanship in the new Kevin Costner film. It is there as a backdrop, but it never really becomes part of the story. All that is really in the plot are ROAD WARRIOR situations set on the ocean, under the false assumption that to make a scene interesting all that is needed is to add water. If you get excited by aerial shots of a line of thirty racing jet skis, this is the film for you.

The change of setting for this post-holocaust film raises it above its cable and video peers, but not nearly enough to justify the expense, logistics, and technical difficulties of shooting this probable fiasco. Even in a summer that has had only one or two decent films, this one does not make itself memorable. (Unless, perhaps it will displace HEAVEN'S GATE as the American film industry's most notorious mistake.)

WATERWORLD is set some unspecified time in the future after global warming has melted the ice caps and the resulting rise in water level has flooded apparently all of the world. Humanity has put to sea long ago and has only mythic memories of the place called "Dryland." (Sorry, there just is not \*that\* much water in the ice

caps.) People have fallen prey to bands of nomadic pirates and it is a constant fight for survival against them and the sea. How this world evolved, how people manage to find proper food, and how they get what is needed to keep the old wrecks afloat are just some of the details that could have added interest to the film. But the most interesting aspects of this world are nearly or completely ignored. That the film concentrates instead on how people fight and kill each other is more a disappointment than a surprise.

WATERWORLD is not without its moments of wry humor. The pirates

are called "smokers" in part because they burn fossil fuels while the "good guys" use more ecologically sound sails, but also because they are rarely seen without cigarettes. It wasn't long ago that it was the heroes of the film who smoked. Are we being told that the smokers of our day, already somewhat social outcasts, are to become the pirates of tomorrow? Just a side comment: one wonders how good these cigarettes would taste in a world where the land needed to grow tobacco is lost in a forgotten past. The leader of the smokers is the wise-cracking Deacon. Dennis Hopper plays this as the occasionally funny whacked-out character that is pretty much his trademark. Some of his lines are funny and others just bizarre. He is not great but he steals what show there is from the ever-mild Kevin Costner playing the unnamed lead, a mariner consistently upstaged by his own spring-loaded trimaran. There is not much more personality from female lead Jeanne Tripplehorn of BASIC INSTINCT and THE FIRM.

There are much better stories to make films with a budget of \$1,300,000 per minute of screen time of, and there are much cheaper ways to make a comic book of a film that rates only a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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4. In our constant quest to bring you expert opinions, here is a review and commentary from one of our members who has actually served on a U. S. Navy submarine:

CRIMSON TIDE (a film review by Rob Mitchell):

When Hollywood makes a dramatic movie involving an intricate, highly technical area, the film necessarily must simplify the subject somewhat, to make the subject more approachable (i.e., "entertaining") to the audience. When watching the film, experts in the field (e.g. computers) might grimace, snicker, moan, or (on rare occasions) applaud the efforts made to paint a realistic picture of the topic. For example, as someone with a strong background in submarine design and operations, I applauded DAS BOOT and THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER. The hardware, the characterizations, the situations, the vocabulary--these all struck a familiar chord,

and enhanced my appreciation for those suspenseful movies. RED OCTOBER, particularly, benefited from the close participation of the United States Navy.

Unfortunately, a new film in the theaters these days is more cause for grimacing than applauding. CRIMSON TIDE, starring Gene Hackman as the sub's Commanding Officer, and Denzel Washington as the sub's second in command, tries very hard to be 1995's RED OCTOBER. Washington reports to the USS Alabama, a ballistic missile submarine going on deterrent patrol, and almost immediately has a difficult relationship with Hackman. Washington is a theory man, highly trained but never in combat. Hackman, we are told, is one of the few submariners who saw combat in the Gulf War. Characterizations are two-dimensional. Hackman is a stereotypical pre-Tailhook "salty CO"--he smokes cigars, makes crude jokes, plays mind games with Washington, blatantly ignores common sense by taking his dog on patrol with him, etc. Washington is married, quiet, cultured, thoughtful, and lest we think he's too stuffy, he even knows something about comic books.

The movie postulates political turmoil in Russia, resulting in hardliners getting control of some Russia intercontinental ballistic missiles--obviously a grave threat to US security (not to mention the rest of the world). In addition, intelligence reports indicate that the hardliners have control of one or more Russian attack submarines, adding a personal note of danger for the crew of the US sub. Within days, the Alabama receives a radio message indicating the hardliners are fueling their missiles, and therefore the Alabama is to launch some of its missiles in a preemptive strike against the hardliners' missile base. Shortly after that message is received, the tactical situation turns ugly, and in the midst of fighting for its survival the Alabama receives a fragment of a message that relates to the missile firing--a fragment that could mean anything. Washington wants to wait for the message to be repeated; Hackman decides to proceed with the launching procedure since the Russian missiles are being fueled and could be fired at any time.

The US Navy withdrew support for CRIMSON TIDE, allegedly because the script contained unpalatable situations and characterizations, particularly for Hackman's character and for the relationship between Hackman and Washington. This lack of Navy support shows, especially in comparison to THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER. Numerous flaws litter the script. Many of them are nits, but they add up. For example, the Commanding Officer is not the person who orders a Weapons System Readiness Test, that decision is reserved for National Command Authority. No one in their right mind wears their white uniform on patrol; it would be ruined within hours by hydraulic fluid, grease from fittings, etc. For that matter, no one wears khakis on patrol, either--officers and enlisted wear coveralls called "poopie suits." Hackman's character has a dog

onboard. I don't care how good an officer he was, there is no way his commodore would let him get away with taking animals on patrol--that's too much of a health hazard. Hackman orders the torpedoes in the starboard tubes to be made ready for firing. A report comes back that tubes 2 and 4 are ready for firing. However, tubes 2 and 4 are on the port side!--and when we finally see the torpedoes fired, we see one each fired from the port and starboard sides!

My biggest source of teeth-gnashing, though, comes from almost every phase of the missile launch procedures. Now granted, much of the procedures involved in the message authentication and missile launch are classified, so I don't expect close adherence to reality. I do expect close adherence to the general philosophy, however. For example, there are dozens of mechanical and procedural impediments put in the procedures to prevent any one person from conducting a launch. One such impediment is that the firing circuit requires two keys to be turned simultaneously -- the Commanding Officer turns one up in the Control Room, the Weapons Officer turns another one down deep in the missile compartment. This is second nature to submariners, yet at a critical time in the movie Hackman allegedly sets the key in the Control Room and then heads down to the Missile Compartment to ensure the other key is turned.

These departures from reality are especially galling because they can mislead the audience into thinking real submarine operations are that potentially disastrous. Maybe submarine commanders are such loose cannons; maybe it is that easy to start World War III... As one non-submariner said after the movie, "Part of me hopes it's not that way, but part of me fears it is." Such fears were not abated by a paragraph displayed at the end of the film, "As of January 1996, primary control of the ability to launch nuclear missile will no longer reside with captains of nuclear submarines. It will reside with the President of the the United States." Sorry, but that's the way it's been from the beginning -- sub captains never had primary control. I resent the movie for raising such unjustified fears.

It's not a totally worthless film, of course. The suspense was

intense and sustained, and some details were right. Nonetheless, I was quite unhappy when I left the theatre, and I cannot recommend the movie. [-rlm]

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5. LITTLE ODESSA (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: A deliberate and atmospheric look at a Russian-Jewish family in the Brighton Beach

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community of Brooklyn. The Shapira family's disintegration is hastened by the return of Joshua, a son who is a contract killer for the Russian Mafia. Younger brother Reuben is also turning to crime and the influence of his brother is only hastening the process. This is a dark and provocative film. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4)

Joshua Shapira is back in Brighton Beach. This is not necessarily good news for his family. Joshua's parents came from Russia to Little Odessa, the Russian Jewish section of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn many years ago and raised two sons, Joshua and Reuben. Years ago Joshua fell in with the organizatsya (Russian Mafia), committed a contract killing, and fled. Now he is back for another contract kill. He wants to come and go unnoticed by his family, but his younger brother Reuben hears of his presence and arranges to contact Joshua. Reuben has already been skipping school for weeks and hiding the fact from his parents. Now he is drawn to the influence of his brother. Reuben's father Arkady must try to hold on to his son, but his position is badly compromised by his own long-standing affair with an immigrant woman. What follows is not so much the morality play it might sound, but a bleak and at times violent story of crime in a community that has not been portrayed in film before.

The dark spirit of this film is underscored by dim or occasionally harsh lighting. In addition, while the film is in English, some of the dialogue in Yiddish and Russian and not all of the Yiddish is

translated for the audience, occasionally adding to the dark tone of the film.

LITTLE ODESSA was written and directed by twenty-five-year-old James Gray, who already has a very sure hand at directing and has assembled a surprisingly well-known cast for so young a director's first film. Reuben Shapira is played by Edward Furlong, probably best known from TERMINATOR II, but he also was the main character in A HOME OF OUR OWN. Joshua Shapira is played by Tim Roth, who already has a distinguished career playing creeps of various sorts including the effete but ruthless Cunningham in ROB ROY and the restaurant-robbing "Honey-Bunny" in PULP FICTION. His Joshua is a mass of contradictions, loving his family but as ready to reach for his gun and point it between a victim's eyes as he would be to reach for a house key and put it in a lock. Maximilian Schell plays Arkady, the immigrant father who just cannot relate to his two sons. When they were just small children he read them CRIME AND PUNISHMENT. Neither of his sons can respond to his Old World intellectualism and neither can summon much respect for him. Also present in the cast are Moira Kelly and Vanessa Redgrave, the latter as the main characters' mother dying of cancer.

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One false move seems to be the music assembled by Dana Sano. It draws heavily on Russian source music, but much of that is choral music. Somehow this conjures up images of the Russian Orthodox Church and just does not feel like the music of the Russian Jewish community. While I am willing to be corrected, I suspect that this music would be no more popular with Russian Jewish immigrants than with any other immigrants from any other part of Europe.

LITTLE ODESSA is a complex and disturbing film with a dark tone. It may have a teenage main character, but it is not a film for young audiences. There is a good deal of violence in the film, but it is more implied than shown and there is very little blood. This film gets a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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Law is a bottomless pit; it is a cormorant, a harpy that  
devours everything.

-- Jonathan Swift