

Issue #2 • June 2018

Girls, On Film

A zine about 80s movies.



RAD

GYMKATA

NORTH SHORE

VISION QUEST

STEALING HOME

BETTER OFF DEAD

JOHNNY BE GOOD

GLEAMING THE CUBE

THE SPORTS ISSUE

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GIRLS. ON SPORTS FILMS

Girls, on Film is a zine that is hopelessly devoted to 80s movies. In this issue, we're tackling sports movies (including non-competitive, non-team activities like surfing and skating).

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ABOUT THE ZINE

This zine is co-founded and managed by Stephanie McDevitt and Janene Scelza. We're based in Washington, DC. **Stephanie** is a freelance writer and editor. Born at the dawn of the 80s, she 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 video stores in search of every 80s movie her hometown had to offer.

Wanna join the Girls? Suggest a movie or theme? Email thegirlsonfilmzine@gmail.com.

NO GUTS, NO GLORY: RAD

1986 • Written by Sam Bernard and Geoffrey Edwards • Directed by Hal Needham • Essay by Stephanie McDevitt

Rad is a quintessential 80s movie. The plot, the soundtrack, and the BMX storyline all come together to create this cult classic that does not disappoint. While simple and cringeworthy at times, *Rad* plays on the well-worn themes of bringing down The Man, standing by your principles, and doing what you love. Plus, the title is *Rad*. You don't get much more 80s than that.

In the small town of Cochran, Mayor Coop Jennings (Gordon Signer) has agreed to host Helltrack, a professional BMX event, in an effort to boost the local economy. With the support of the townspeople, the mayor works with the founder of the Federation of American Bicyclists, Duke Best (Jack Weston), to plan the event, which includes a race, a parade, a dance, and a winner's party



The writing is on the wall.

The one thing Helltrack doesn't include is space for any local BMX riders. To appease the townspeople and the BMX riders in Cochran, Duke agrees to include

a qualifying race to give the local kids a chance. Since they will compete against professional riders, Duke makes this promise thinking none of amateur riders will come close to qualifying.

Enter Cru Jones (Bill Allen), a high school kid who works two jobs to help support his single mother (Talia Shire) and younger sister (Laura Jacoby). He also happens to be a great BMX rider. Much to his mother's dismay, Cru decides to blow off his SATs and race in the qualifying round. As expected, he survives the qualifier and squeaks into the main event.

Duke Best, concerned that Cru is good enough to win Helltrack, tries to interfere with Cru's ability to race. You see, if Cru defeats the best rider in the race, Bart Taylor (Bart Conner), Duke will lose a lot of money in merchandising and sponsorships. Taylor, who is a typical 80s movie jerk, actually wants to race Cru and beat him to prove he's the best BMX rider in the competition.

Well, everything eventually works out. Cru is allowed to race, and the movie hits its apex with the race on Helltrack. The four-lap event is billed as the most diabolical combination of jumps, turns, and tracks that these riders will ever face. Despite the difficult track and an early fall, Cru manages to win the race and the respect of Bart Taylor (along with \$100,000 and a new Corvette). Duke loses his business opportunities and a bunch of money, while the people of Cochran celebrate their new



Cru and his friends show off their budget BMX gear.

hero.

Rad wasn't well received by critics, but it has become a cult favorite over the years. In fact, the critics score on Rotten Tomatoes is 0%, but viewers have ranked it at 91% fresh (as of this writing). What made it such a hit with viewers? Bill Allen wrote a book about his career and his time filming *Rad* (it's called [My Rad Career](#)), and his theory is that kids loved seeing the pro riders. He says, "These were the top stunt riders in the world, because THEY INVENTED THE SPORT. Hal [the director] was able to capture the brilliance of the athletes at the height of their powers, and weave it into a palatable storyline, one we'd seen a thousand times, but these athletes were unique in all the world. To a young bike rider, seeing these stunts performed for the first time on film was a life-altering revelation."

The movie is filled with impressive BMX stunts. In fact, the first eight minutes is

a BMX montage set to John Farnham's "Break the Ice." The Helltrack race sequence is essentially also a montage and all of it is performed by professional riders. If you are a BMX fan on any level, I can see how this would appeal to you.

In addition to the stunts, Helltrack was actually really difficult to navigate. According to the [80s Movie Rewind](#), veteran BMX rider Kevin Hull said "When I got there they were still finishing the track. I could not believe what I was seeing. The starting hill was huge and steep...The last thing to be filmed at Helltrack was the start of the race. The reason for this was because nobody wanted to be the first one to ride down it. Every day we were filming we would try to figure out the best way down the start and who was going to try it first."

Personally, I enjoyed this one. It has just enough 80s cheese, and the story is simple and fast moving. What I found most



The future's so bright.

surprising, is that the town of Cochran was totally supportive of both the BMX race and Cru. When Duke starts enforcing, or inventing, rules that were never previously mentioned in order to derail Cru's Helltrack appearance the town rallies behind him.

First, Cru is told he can't race because he doesn't have a sponsor. So, Cru and his crew start making and selling t-shirts for Rad Racing, Cru's new sponsor (you can [still buy these shirts today](#)). When Duke informs Cru that his sponsorship actually has to be worth \$50,000, a number the kids would never reach selling \$10, homemade t-shirts, the town comes together to raise the money.

The love story intertwined with the movie is also fun to watch. Cru meets Christian (Lori Laughlin), who is the best amateur female BMX rider in the country. They have several cute BMX rides together and overall create a sweet romance as a B plot to the Helltrack storyline. My favorite scene comes when Cru and Christian do a BMX routine during the Helltrack dance. It's a great scene, slo-motion at times, set to "Send Me An Angel," by Real Life.

This brings me to another high point for the movie: the soundtrack. It's full of 80s



Christian schools Cru.

power pop and works well with the action on screen.

There is one point that I find rather confusing. Why cast Bart Conner as Bart Taylor? Conner was a gymnast and 2-time Olympic gold medalist at the 1984 Olympics. *Rad* is the only movie he ever made, and his acting is not great. He definitely looks the part of the 80s movie jerk, with blonde hair and a good smirk, he kind of channels Billy Zabka's Johnny from *The Karate Kid*. In this [interview](#), he explains how he ended up getting cast in the movie, but there isn't an interesting story behind it. I wonder why, if they wanted an accomplished athlete in the role, they didn't just cast one of the BMX riders?

Overall *Rad* was a great exposé for BMX riders wrapped in a cheesy 80s movie. The acting was what you'd expect from something so focused on BMX, but you should check it out for the stunts, romance, and soundtrack. As the title implies, It's Rad!

FIND THIS MOVIE: Available on Special Edition DVD and Blu Ray. Good quality bootleg available at www.pinbike.com.

HOLLYWOOD GETS A SURFING MOVIE RIGHT: NORTH SHORE

1987 • Written by Tim McCanlies and William Phelps • Directed
by William Phelps • Essay by Janene Scelza

Other than documentaries, I can't think of that many great surfing movies. Anything young and hip has always been ripe territory for embarrassingly out-of-touch Hollywood productions, and that's especially true of surfing movies. The ones that beat audiences over the head with the "soul surfer" narrative are especially cringey.

North Shore is both cheesy and preachy, but it's one of the few times Hollywood managed to get more right than wrong about a surfing movie. It centers around a young guy (Matt Adler as Rick Kane) who loves surfing and wants to know if he has what it takes to be a great surfer. But, he's got a whole lot to learn, both in and out of the water. Luckily, he meets people who teach him the ropes. It's a light, entertaining movie with some great surfing footage (this movie marked the feature film debut of veteran surf movie cinematographer, Don King), and a great rock/pop soundtrack. It's also endlessly quotable, thanks in large part to John Philbin's pidgin-speaking character, Turtle.

Pro surfers played major and minor roles in the movie. The main cast includes Mark "Occy" Occhilupo as himself; Robbie Page as his best mate, Alex Rogers; Gerry Lopez as Vince Moaloka, leader of the infamous DaHui gang; and legendary big wave surfer, Laird Hamilton, as asshole superstar surfer, Lance Burkhart. (Hamilton got the

role on Lopez's recommendation). Plus, Adler, Philbin, and actor Gregory Harrison who plays Rick's mentor, Chandler, already knew how to surf, sparing the need for too many stunt doubles in bad wigs. (Philbin currently operates a [surf school](#) in Maui).



Rick ain't seen nothing yet!

The movie opens with Rick winning a surfing contest at a wave tank and announcing that he's going to use his winnings to travel to Hawaii for the summer to surf the big waves of the North Shore. He's got a partial scholarship to an art school in New York City starting in the fall and his mom worries that if he gets too hung up on surfing, he'll throw away a valuable opportunity. (Apparently, his mother has a lot of faith in the marketability of art school graduates).

But, Rick loves surfing, though it's a rather unusual interest for a kid living in



Pro surfer Hans Heademann rocking the Pink & Yellow.

landlocked Arizona. And he's making the summer sojourn to Hawaii to see if he has what it takes to be a great surfer. If he does, then maybe he can call that a career and make bucket loads of money like his idol, Burkhart.

Unfortunately, Rick encounters a string of bad luck the minute he sets foot in Hawaii. The guy he had planned to stay with (without any notice) tells him to get lost. One of the Hui goons steals his stuff at the beach. And young, cocky Rick jumps right into big wave surfing completely unprepared and wipes out hard, twice. The first time, he takes out Vince, pissing off DaHui. The second time, he breaks his board.

Rick is what Turtle calls a "Barney" -- a kook in and out of the water. He's not only cocky about big wave surfing, but he's also completely oblivious to delicate social norms. The real DaHui gang formed in the late 1970s in response to contest promoters and the surfer tourists they brought to Hawaii hogging the waves and [shutting out the locals](#). (Laird Hamilton

also talks about this in the recent surfing documentary, *Take Every Wave*). The locals are especially wary of these Haoles (non-natives) on the North Shore, where the surf is intense, the crowds are massive, and the risk of serious injury is high.

Luckily, Rick befriends some locals who teach him about more than just surfing. There's Turtle, the scene-stealing surfboard shaper who works for Chandler; Kiani (Nia Peeples), Rick's love interest (though it's complicated by the fact that she's also Vince's cousin); and Chandler, the resident soul surfer who teaches Rick how to ride the big boy waves.

Middle-aged Chandler is a stark contrast to young celebrity hot doggers like Rick's idol, Lance Burkhart. "Some people think a wave is just for carving up," he explains to Rick. "A true surfer knows the wave." His teaching methods reflect this: they begin without surfboards, spending a lot of time just observing the ocean. The viewer is treated to a mini-lesson in the mechanics of surfing, as well as the evolution of the surfboard, as Rick learns to surf on all

kinds of boards, starting with a massive, canoe-sized longboard made of koa wood, “same as the ancient Hawaiian’s made them.”

Chandler sometimes gets way too self-indulgent with the soul surfer baloney. Burkhart commissions him to build a board, and when he tells Chandler that the shape is all wrong for his style of surfing, Chandler insists that he “only makes boards one way: the right way.” Rick can’t understand why Chandler wouldn’t build the board the way Burkhart wanted, and Turtle tells him that he wouldn’t understand, as if there’s some unforeseen wisdom to the whole pointless exchange.

Chandler also despises contests, saying they encourage the “worst in the human animal.” A magazine photographer takes an interest in Rick after seeing him surf. He tells Rick that he’s good enough to get sponsored, but must first enter and do well in a big contest like the upcoming Pipeline World Classic (PWC), which brings surfers from all over the world to compete. (The grand prize is \$10K). When Rick sheepishly tells Chandler that he entered, Chandler gets pissy about it, saying “go ahead, go shred.”

The contest is pretty anti-climactic. For one thing, surfing contests aren’t conducive to the brief, intense showdown that is so typical of sports movies. The PWC in particular spans several days. Any momentum built up in the contest scenes is quickly lost to the slower Rick & Kiani love scenes happening in the interim.

Rick surprises everyone with how well he does in the contest, beating out some of the pros, but because he’s some virtuous soul surfer, he’s not supposed to be



Kiani takes a shine to Rick.

interested in the outcome. When Burkhart cheats, causing Rick to be eliminated, Chandler says they will file a protest. Rick chuckles, reminding him that “it doesn’t mean anything... not to us soul surfers.”

At the end of the film, Rick is no longer a super kook. And, having accomplished what he set out to do, he decides to go on to New York to attend art school. But, before he leaves, he assures Turtle and Kiani, who see him off, that he will return.

North Shore never did well enough at the box office for that sequel to pan out, but John Philbin did take to social media a few years ago to rally fans of the cult classic to lobby Universal to let him make the sequel. He had reportedly been writing a script with one of the original co-writers, although the plot sounded more like the dreaded R-word (reboot) than a bona fide follow-up. [Surfer Magazine pleaded](#) with John to abandon the idea, because God forbid we leave the future of anything to the imagination anymore.

FIND THIS MOVIE: Available on DVD or rent online. Shoddy bootlegs are also on available on YouTube.

BOYS WILL BE BOYS: STEALING HOME

1988 • Written and Directed by Steven Kampmann and William Porter (as Will Aldis)

Essay by Stephanie McDevitt

Stealing Home feels, at first, like a baseball movie. You know, one of those white, American, male, childhood/coming of age stories that explores the father-son relationship. Or maybe the one where the ladies man/team hero learns some life lessons, gets the girl, and wins the championship. Sadly, this movie doesn't turn out to be any of those things. Instead, *Stealing Home* is overrun with nostalgia, idealism, underdeveloped characters, and choppy time shifts, making it confusing, unbelievable, and my least favorite baseball movie thus far.



Washed up Billy Wyatt.

It begins with Billy Wyatt (Mark Harmon) happily marching across a baseball field and preparing for a game for which he is hours early (the directors carefully place a clock in the shot to show us it's only 7:30am as he puts on his uniform). With a time jump forward, he is listening to the

National Anthem, and he begins his first voiceover. Six months ago, he tells us, he was lost and living in a crappy motel, but Katie Chandler brought him back to baseball.

Flashback to that crappy motel where Billy, a washed up minor league baseball player, is living. We also see that he has stubble and he's smoking cigarettes, so we know he must be struggling. Billy gets a call from his mother (Blair Brown) who tells him that Katie has killed herself. She explains that Billy needs to come home because Katie stated in her will that she wants Billy to be in charge of scattering her ashes. Katie said he would know what to do with them. Guess what? He doesn't.

This set up sends Billy on a trip back home that includes several flashbacks and time jumps. In the first flashback we meet a 16-year-old Katie Chandler (Jodie Foster) who is babysitting 10-year-old-Billy (Thacher Goodwin). Katie is the cool babysitter. She uses slang, smokes, and breaks the rules by driving them out to the beach for the day. She also likes baseball.

The next flashback is Billy as a 16-year-old high school baseball player (William McNamara). This is the time period in which most of the movie plays out. First, we see him win a game for his high school team by stealing home (see how they did that), then we get a scene in which he



Adventures in babysitting.

loses his virginity, and then, his dad dies in a car accident. After the funeral, Billy puts his glove and uniform away in the attic, and we can only assume he intends to quit baseball for good.

Throughout the summer following his dad's death, Billy, his mother, younger sister, and best friend Alan (Jonathan Silverman) all stay at the Chandler's beach house with Katie. This is a different location than the beach Katie took Billy to when he was 10. It is easy to confuse the two locations and this turns out to be important. The summer obviously ends with Katie and Billy in bed together (despite the fact that she is 21 and has said she is involved with another man), and Katie instructing Billy to keep playing baseball.

Flash forward to present day Billy who is still struggling to figure out what Katie wants him to do with her ashes. Billy calls on Alan (adult Alan is played by Harold Ramis), and they decide to get very drunk,

put on their high school baseball uniforms, and break into a ball park. After carousing around town all night, Billy decides that he will just give the ashes back to Katie's parents. But, as he's sitting in their dining room, he realizes Katie would want her ashes scattered at the beach she took him to when he was 10. So, he drives out there, aggressively throws her ashes into the ocean, and realizes that he needs to return to baseball. Flash forward to Billy playing in the present-day baseball game, and he steals home (AGAIN!) to win the game.

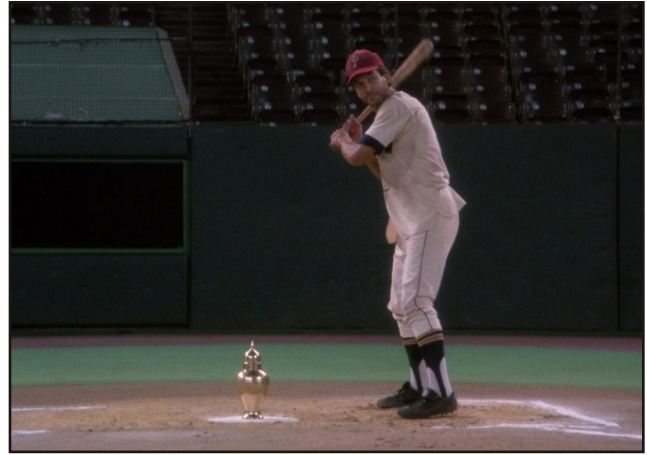
I was not impressed with this movie. It just wasn't believable. The most ridiculous moment, for me, came at the expense of Jonathan Silverman. Silverman pretty much plays the same character he did 3 years earlier in *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*; he's the fast-talking, best friend looking to get a girl by generally acting creepy. Throughout the summer he spends with Billy at the Chandler's beach house, Alan

spies on the woman renting out the Chandler's guest cottage. The woman, whose name, according to IMDB, is Lesley (Beth Broderick) but I cannot remember if they even called her by name in the movie, knows Alan is watching her and eventually invites him in and sleeps with him. Let me repeat: she sleeps with a 16-year-old peeping tom.

This plot point is one of many in which the female characters act as nothing more than sexual partners for Billy and Alan. Katie and Lesley are both older women who sleep with teenagers and seem to relish their roles both as sexual conquest and teacher. Even Robin Parks (Yvette Croskey), the girl who takes Billy's virginity early in the movie, plays this same part. She is the instigator and throws herself at him, and even though her mom is home, she insists they do it anyway. It is an unattractive portrayal of these characters and a waste of some pretty good actors.

Continuing their poor characterization of women, Katie becomes nothing more than a prop in the later part of the movie when adult Billy is seen carrying her urn around wherever he goes. He places the urn on home plate when he and Alan play drunk baseball. When they go to a diner for breakfast, he puts it on the table and hangs his hat on top of it. This seems a little disrespectful, and it's a big urn, so it's cumbersome and awkward for him to carry around. When he finally spreads her ashes, in a maniacal sprint down the pier, he throws both the urn and the ashes into the ocean. It all just comes across as crazy and undignified.

Critical reception of this movie was, um, not good. Most critics hated it, citing the



Katie's ashes play baseball.

confusing chronology, poor staging, and over-reaching sentimentality. Apparently, screenwriters Steven Kampmann and William Porter loosely based this movie on some of their own experiences, but I can't imagine much of what made it into the final cut was actually true. Roger Ebert [said it best](#): "This is one of those movies where the filmmakers remember the golden days of their adolescence and are so overcome with emotion that they fail to recognize their memories as clichés learned from other movies."

Stealing Home made \$7.46 million in the US, which is about half of what it cost to make. Mark Harmon defended the movie in an [interview](#) with Entertainment Weekly. "That was about a bunch of actors loving a script, going there and burning it on both ends for five weeks just to get it done. That was a fun one to make. I hear a lot about that role. People really found that movie on video." So, Mark Harmon said it has an audience. It might have been fun to make, Mark, but it was not fun to watch.

FIND THIS MOVIE: Available on DVD, or rent online.

THE GAMBLE, THE GIRL, AND THE GLORY: VISION QUEST

1985 • Written by Darryl Ponicsan, Douglas Day Stewart (screenplay), and Terry Davis (novel)
• Directed by Harold Becker • Essay by Janene Scelza

Vision Quest is one of the more obscure coming-of-age films of the 1980s, although it [seems to be](#) essential viewing among generations of wrestlers. Adapting Terry Davis's (mostly) autobiographical novel of the same name, the movie begins the week after high school wrestler Loudon Swain (Matthew Modine) turns 18. Loudon says it wasn't something he was ready for, because he doesn't feel like he's accomplished enough to honor the milestone. But that will soon change. This is the year that Loudon plans to make his mark.



Maker's mark.

It's not that Loudon hasn't accomplished *anything*. He's smart and ambitious and a championship wrestler on a highly-ranked high school team. But this season, he's got plans for something bigger: to drop 23 pounds so he can wrestle the number one

guy at 168, Brian Shute (Frank Jasper).

Shute is an absolute beast. (Jasper was a bodybuilder at the time). His workout routine is more suitable for training for a Strong Man competition than mere high school wrestling meets. And he's undefeated on the mat. Naturally, everyone thinks Loudon is nuts for wanting to challenge the guy, especially when he's already number one in his own weight class. The starry-eyed editor of the school paper, Margie Epstein (Daphne Zuniga), imagines the headline: "When determination becomes insanity." Some of Loudon's teammates also worry that he could jeopardize their chances at a state title. But there's something alluring about beating the best and Loudon is determined to do just that.

Louden's best friend, Kuch (Michael Shoeffling in one of his few roles outside of *Sixteen Candles*), calls it a vision quest, referring to the Native American ritual of going on walkabout to find one's place in the "circle" of life and everything after. It's hard to see how training for a wrestling match yields spiritual enlightenment, short of Loudon hallucinating while he's starving himself to make weight and constantly working out.

Louden doesn't start having visions, but the training does take a serious toll on his body, as frequent nosebleeds and



Wrestle Shute, he said. It'll be fun.

fainting spells threaten to derail his quest. So does his relationship with Carla (Linda Fiorentino).

Carla is the sophisticated 21-year old woman temporarily living in his house. They met when Carla got tired of hitchhiking to San Francisco “to be an artist” and stopped in Spokane to buy a used car with the money she had left. She didn’t get far; the salesman knowingly pawned off a piece of junk. When Loudon’s dad (Ronny Cox), the mechanic on the lot, hears about it, he punches the creep all the way into unemployment. Loudon shows up in the aftermath and, learning that Carla has no place to go and no money to get there, he convinces his dad to let her stay with them until they can fix the car.

Terry Davis has often said that his book was meant to counter the typical portrayal of the high school jock as a sex-crazed meathead. Unfortunately, its cinematic

counterpart was packaged as yet another 80s movie about the desperate teenage male virgin and the sexy, older woman who curiously takes pity on him (see also Steph’s essay on *Stealing Home* in this issue). Loudon’s pining is especially tiresome, as he never ceases dropping hints about getting laid any time Carla is around. He even turns violent at one point, pinning her to the bed and threatening to rape her after she calls him out on his bullshit. And though she manages to fight back, they later kiss and make up and it’s all supposed to be very romantic. What. The. Hell.

The women in *Vision Quest* – what few there are – don’t get much credit, anyways. Loudon’s mother ran off with another man after his dad lost the family farm. And Kuch’s mother is an institutionalized alcoholic (though his father isn’t much better off).

After they hookup, Loudon’s interest in the

Shute match starts to wane. Having finally indulged in some pleasure after restricting himself so much during training, he begins to wonder whether he really was suffering from a bout of temporary insanity when he decided put his body through the wringer to get pummeled by a beast. It seems a bit convoluted, given how many characters (portrayed by a stellar supporting cast) appear to exist solely to provide moral support. Still, Carla urges him to see it through or risk regretting it later.

In many ways, *Vision Quest* follows the usual sports movie formula, and we eventually get to the big payoff: Loudon and Shute face off on the mat. Perhaps more unusual is that these are two equally capable wrestlers, and Shute never really gives viewers a reason to hate him (with the exception of some light trash-talking where Shute tells Loudon he can't "hold his mud" after he witnesses a forfeit because of Loudon's nosebleed). Perhaps that is what makes *Vision Quest* such a timeless classic for wrestling enthusiasts: the sport is treated with a sort of gentlemen quality. And of course, the entire arena goes wild when Loudon emerges, victorious (look for Terry Davis in a cameo, he's seated next to Loudon's English teacher).

The book was quite different; Terry Davis never divulges the winner of the match, but instead chose to focus on Loudon's journey leading up to that point. Written from Loudon's point of view in a stream-of-consciousness style (it's often compared to *Catcher in the Rye*), the novel is heavy on self-reflection and nostalgia as Loudon shares stories about growing up, about his friends, about the prospects for the future, and of course, about wrestling.

He demonstrates a vision quest far more than cinematic Loudon. While Terry Davis [has said](#) that he was satisfied with the way the movie turned out, acknowledging that some things had to change to sell it to mainstream audiences, there was, to me, a lot lost in translation. I wonder if its something better suited to contemporary filmmakers. There was an attempt to remake the movie. Actor Taylor Lautner, riding high on *Twilight* fame, bought the rights in 2009, though the project seems to have fizzled since.



Hello, MTV marketing!

Overall, *Vision Quest* is an enjoyable, little low-key film. It also has a wonderful soundtrack, which includes songs by Journey, Foreigner, REO Speedwagon, John Waite, Don Henley, and Red Rider, who's "Lunatic Fringe" wonderfully punctuates Loudon's anticipation in the moments before the big match. Tangerine Dream composed the score. And a then-unknown Madonna (she was famous by the time of the film's release) can be seen performing "Crazy for You" and "Gambler."

FIND THIS MOVIE: Available to buy on DVD and Blu Ray, or rent online.

BAD TO THE BONE: JOHNNY BE GOOD

1988 • Written by Steve Zacharias, Jeff Buhai, and David Obst
Directed by Bud S. Smith • Essay by Stephanie McDevitt

Johnny Be Good is a terrible movie. Let's get that out of the way right now. It is bad. There is no reason to try to defend it. It's an abomination. And to be honest, I can't tell what this movie wanted to be. It's set up to be a movie about the college recruiting process of a high school football star. But is it supposed to be a zany comedy, or a serious look at rule-breaking recruiting practices? I don't know and I don't think the



Leo and Johnny show off their smirks.

writers knew either.

The plot follows home town hero Johnny Walker (Anthony Michael Hall) through his football recruiting process. The movie starts as Johnny quarterbacks his team to their second consecutive state championship. As soon as the game is over, Johnny leaves the locker room and is bombarded by a bunch of old men in ugly,

plaid jackets begging him to play football at their schools. They all seem buffoonish as they make promises of cash, cars, and girls, and Johnny doesn't take any of them seriously.

As he makes his way through the crowd he eventually sees his girlfriend, Georgia (Uma Thurman), and she tells him she's grounded because her dad saw the hickey on her neck that Johnny gave her. As they are talking, Georgia's dad, the police chief (Marshall Bell), drives up in his police car and uses the loud speaker to tell Johnny to stay away from his daughter.

So, after the first ten minutes of the movie, we learn that Johnny is a sexually active football star, who is already famous for his athletic abilities and infamous for his sexual exploits. Everyone loves him, except for his girlfriend's father, but when he finally gets home later that day, we meet his family and learn that, at heart, he is just a good kid from a good family. Kudos to the screen writers for packing in all the jock stereotypes right at the beginning.

As the movie goes on, we watch Johnny go on ridiculous recruiting visits to two fictional schools, Olde Tex and UCC, both obvious mirrors of real schools in Texas and California. On these visits the schools throw big parties, have lot of girls on hand for the football players' delights, and there is drinking, steroid use, and a lot of money

tossed around.

Meanwhile, back at home, Johnny's family and friends fall victim to recruiters' bribes and schemes to get them to help convince Johnny to attend their schools. Also, Georgia, aware of the fact that there are girls throwing themselves at Johnny, gets mad at him because she suspects he cheated. While working her job at a butcher shop, they argue and she throws a whole chicken at him. A quick side note, this movie is rife with misogyny, but to Johnny's credit, he never actually cheats on Georgia that we see. He does go to strip clubs, and enjoys having women all up on him, but there is no kissing or sex. So, there's that.



Uma's about to throw that chicken.

Johnny had promised Georgia that he would go to State with her. But after a visit to State, where the coach says he will actually be expected to go to class and get an education, Johnny is unsure he wants to do that. He is getting such great opportunities for money and cars at other schools, why go some place that won't give him a good deal?

In the end, Johnny's mom tells him he's lost sight of what's important (education,

family, etc.) and he needs to get his priorities straight. He goes to his signing day and announces that he has decided not to play anywhere because he doesn't like the sneaky and illegal tactics used by all these schools. Cut to a scene with the football coach at State in which Johnny asks for a spot on the team. The coach agrees, and thus Johnny has a place to play and go to school, and his mom and girlfriend are happy with his decision to do "the right thing."

This sounds pretty straight forward, right? However, there are a few plot points that make this movie strange (and terrible). First, as Johnny goes through the recruiting process there is a guy following him around. He appears to be a private investigator and we know this because he occasionally makes notes into a small tape recorder. At the very end of the movie he shows up at Johnny's press conference and announces he's an investigator for the NCAA and that, due to all the illegal recruiting activity, the NCAA is launching a full investigation into three different schools.

As the end credits roll, we learn that the schools received suspensions and that certain recruiters were banned via captions on the screen. Up until this point, this movie had been so over the top and so unbelievable that we were really living in zany comedy territory. To try to add a serious plot point here and push an ethical discussion about college recruiting doesn't work.

Then there is Johnny's high school coach, Wayne Hisler (Paul Gleason). He wants Johnny to go to Piermont College, where, if he can convince Johnny to go there, he will get the head coaching job and



Steroids for everyone!

a sweet contract. However, Johnny hates him and won't comply with his wishes. So, in order to get Johnny to do what he wants, he sets him up for rape. Yes, you read that correctly. He gets girls to bring Johnny to a hotel, then he calls the cops (Georgia's father), and they raid the hotel room where Johnny is fully dressed and the girls are running around topless yelling rape. Johnny and his friend Leo (Robert Downey, Jr.) are thrown in jail and Hisler won't bail them out unless he agrees to go to Piermont. Who thought this was a good idea?

I wonder why the actors all agreed to do this movie. Anthony Michael Hall had already appeared in *National Lampoon's Vacation*, *Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *Weird Science*. He had established himself as the smart, little guy who's king of the nerds. Maybe he was trying to change his image, but even with some weight packed on, he is not believable as a sexpot, sports hero. Furthermore, he looked bored and disinterested throughout most of the movie. Robert Downey Jr. played Leo in a

bizarre fashion. Maybe it was a defense mechanism against the horrible script, I don't know, but it was terrible.

Critical reception was not good, as one would expect with a film this bad. [Roger Ebert said](#), "The people who made this movie should be ashamed of themselves." [Hal Hinson of the Washington Post said](#), "I doubt if I could stand to be in the same state as anyone who liked the new Anthony Michael Hall film *Johnny Be Good*." It is 0% fresh on rotten tomatoes and has an average 2.3 rating. The film flopped at the box office and was \$2.5 million short of breaking even. It won a Razzie for worst original song, "Skintight" by Ted Nugent.

In the end the film makers pack in one final insult: a terrible cover of "Johnny B Good" by Judas Priest. Over all, this movie is a mess, and I am glad I can put this to bed and move on with my life.

FIND THIS MOVIE: Included with Amazon Prime Video. If you do watch this movie, promise to never pay for it.

HITTING THE SLOPES: BETTER OFF DEAD

1985 • Written and Directed by Savage Steve Holland • Essay by Janene Scelza

Savage Steve Holland's gift to the 80s was zany teen parodies like *One Crazy Summer*, *How I Got into College*, and *Better Off Dead*, the movie that puts teenage melodrama under the microscope. It begins with a break-up: mild-mannered teen, Lane Meyer (John Cusack), has just been dumped by Beth, his girlfriend of six months (Amanda Wyss). To make things worse, she dumps him for Zabka-esque asshole, Roy Stalin (Aaron Dozier), captain of the Greendale High ski team. Roy Stalin!! Can you believe it?! Just because he's more popular, has better hair, drives a better car, and is the only one in town who can ski the K-12!

Everyone in Greendale -- a bodaciously small town, according to Lane's best bud, Charles De Mar (played by the excellent Curtis Armstrong) -- seems to know about it, including Lane's geometry teacher (Vincent Schiavelli) and the postman (Taylor Negrn), who want to know if it's okay to ask Beth out now that she's single (and who, in this universe, aren't too weird or too creepy for asking).

The breakup almost immediately transforms Lane from a "once-great champ" to a "study in mopishness," according to a pair of street racing brothers who constantly taunt him in one of many running gags in the movie. At first Lane contemplates suicide, but his several attempts are either comically foiled or he

realizes at last minute that his he does indeed have something to live for. "Wait a minute, this is death! I haven't even been to New York City!" he tells himself.

But, Charles, who's been going to Greendale High for 7 ½ years and is certainly no dummy has a plan to help Lane win Beth back (or, at the very least, to impress any of the other available girls): Lane must beat Roy in a ski race on the K-12.



The once-great champion.

There's a reason why Roy Stalin is the only one in Greendale who can ski the K-12. It's an insane slope, beautifully exaggerated in establishing shots of what look more like stock footage of the French Alps than say, some mountain in Utah where the movie was filmed. And with all the things that seem to be going wrong for Lane after the breakup, killing himself on the K-12 in front of the whole school would



Roy Stalin and his well-oiled machine.

be, in the words of *Seinfeld's* Jackie Chiles, "the most public of [his] many humiliations yet." Which is why Lane only challenges Roy to the race in a fit of temporary insanity, driven to the brink by a guy who won't stop rubbing in his face that Beth chose him over Lane.

It's Monique (Diane Franklin), the French exchange student living with the weird family next door, that helps Lane boost his confidence, and ultimately, get over Beth. "I think all you need is a small taste of success, and you will find it suits you," she says. She starts by helping him fix the tasty Camaro that has been sitting in an auto cocoon on his front lawn, which helps him beat the street racing brothers. Then, when he is savoring that victory, she helps him prepare for the race on the K-12.

The finale is a surprisingly long and intense sequence, and of course, rife with utter silliness. Charles DeMar casually appears on the slopes to tell Lane to shake a leg during the flowery practice scenes with Monique. Johnny the paperboy

is chasing Lane downhill on a bike fitted with skis to collect his two dollars, cash, for delivering papers. And, Lane is thrown off balance, skiing part of the race on only one ski.

In the end, Lane beats Roy and wins not Beth's but Monique's heart, ending in one of those characteristically unbelievable romantic 80s moments - the new couple kissing on top of his Camaro, which is parked inside a baseball stadium.

Better Off Dead is one of my favorite 80s movies. There were a lot of absurdist comedies like these in the 80s, and they didn't always work. Writer/director Savage Steve Holland [has said](#) that *Better Off Dead* is largely autobiographical: his girlfriend had also dumped him for the captain of the ski team and he tried to kill himself, but also failed rather comically.

Because the movie makes light of teenage suicide, the folks behind the now-defunct 80s podcast, *Chips, Dips and Dorks* wondered whether it would be possible to make a movie like this today. I don't



Van Hamburger.

know that a remake for that reason alone would be nixed. After all, *Heathers* made a comeback this year (as a TV series) and that is all about high schoolers bumping off the popular kids.

But, I think the more likely scenario is that *Better Off Dead* couldn't be remade today because dopey, absurdist comedies like these that were so common in the 80s are fairly non-existent now. Holland had said he was basically in the right place at the right time. After the success of *Fast Times of Ridgemont High*, studios wanted more teen movies, and they allowed Holland to be experimental.

And experimental he certainly was. *Better Off Dead* has it all: mini cartoons, claymation, and splendid absurdist insanity. There is so much going on in the Greendale universe: much of it revealed in running gags, like Lane's mother's improvisational cooking; his father's inability to relate to teenagers; his mute brother's surreal cereal box prizes; the Japanese drag racing brothers that looked like something out of Disney's *Wide World of Sports*; Roy hardly ever getting the last laugh because Charles is always laughing.

And, of course, Johnny, the paperboy. The result, [observed film critic Bill Cosford](#), feels more like a student film on a bigger budget.

Holland would never get away with making a movie like this nowadays on the studio dime. Although, *One Crazy Summer* is supposedly getting a sequel after all these years (sans Cusack). And indeed, most of Holland's credits to follow were in kid's TV shows, including the Nickelodeon cult favorite, *Keenan & Kel*, and the excellent animated Fox series, *Eek! The Cat*.

Surprisingly, [Henry Winkler was also instrumental](#) in the making of *Better Off Dead*. After seeing one of Holland's black comedy shorts at an L.A. film festival, he hooked him up with an office at Warner Brothers to write his script.

Winkler also recommended John Cusack for the lead, having executive produced the college-age rom com *The Sure Thing*, which Cusack starred in the previous year. And though he proved to be a natural, the studio was initially hesitant to cast someone with so few roles under his belt.

While the *Better Off Dead* tested well with audiences, it was never a strong performer at the box office. Supposedly, it's star also hated the movie and only wound up doing *One Crazy Summer* because he was contractually obligated. But, as with most of the movies we write about in this zine, *Better Off Dead* garnered a healthy cult following via video rentals and cable TV.

FIND THIS MOVIE: Available on DVD or rent online. High quality bootleg also available via YouTube.

A NEW KIND OF KARATE: GYMKATA

1985 • Written by Charles Robert Carner (screenplay) and Dan Tyler Moor (novel) • Directed by Robert Clouse • Essay by Stephanie McDevitt

Not only is *Gymkata* the second movie featuring an American Olympic gymnast in this issue of *Girls, on Film* (in addition to *Rad*), but it is also a B-movie with cheesy stunts, bad acting, and karate, one of the preferred methods of self-defense in the 80s. It's hard to take this movie seriously, which actually made it kind of fun to watch. While confusing at times, *Gymkata* proved to be a classic bad movie that is perfectly set up for parody.



Karate gymnast in training.

Gymkata is the story of American gymnast Jonathan Cabot (Kurt Thomas) who is recruited by the Special Intelligence Agency (SIA) to travel to the fictional country of Parmistan to compete in The Game. You see, the winner of The Game is granted one request, and the SIA wants to build a satellite system in Parmistan to

protect the US against a nuclear attack. So, the obvious answer is to seek out an Olympic gymnast, train him in martial arts, and send him to a foreign country to complete an obstacle course.

American Johnny agrees to go on this mission. For him, it's personal. His father has been missing and it turns out he was also sent to Parmistan to compete. The thing is, if someone doesn't win The Game, it's likely they were killed along the route.

In order to train for The Game, the SIA brings in Rubali (Tetchie Agbayani), the Parmistan princess, to oversee Johnny's progress. His preparation for The Game includes walking up stairs on his hands (with several close-up shots of Kurt Thomas' crotch), splitting wood with an axe, and sparring with a guy who is much larger than he is. And, of course, falling in love with the princess.

Once Johnny is ready, he heads to Parmistan where he meets the Khan (Buck Kartalian), who finally explains The Game. It's a 3-mile run across the swamp to a 200-foot rope climb. Then another half-mile run to the gorge and then they enter the river to the high forest. On the other side of the high forest they must survive the Village of the Damned (a walled city of the criminally insane) and complete the final 5-mile run through the swamp. Judges will be there to show the way, and



The princess is thrilled about her wedding to Zamir.

anyone trying to avoid an obstacle will be instantly killed. Also, ninjas hunt the contestants as they go along.

The evening prior to the competition, there is a huge banquet where Johnny finds out the Princess is going to marry Zamir (Richard Norton), the corrupt commander who is planning a coup against the Khan. Zamir has it out for Johnny because he knows Johnny loves the princess, so when it comes time for The Game to start, Zamir goes all out and breaks the rules to try to take Johnny down.

The set up for the movie is very complex, and at times hard to follow. The storyline and context needed to understand the complicated plot involving satellite stations, potential coups, and national security are non-existent. There is no explanation as to what The Game is until halfway through the movie, so the whole time we're watching Johnny train and fight, we have no idea what he's training for.

Also, there is a scene where Johnny meets with an American agent who is designing weapons for him, weapons he will presumably use in The Game. But when The Game starts, Johnny's only weapon is his gymnastics.

The most confusing and plot-less part of this movie was Johnny's adventure in the Village of the Damned. When Johnny enters the village, a gate closes behind him and locks him in. But, it doesn't seem like Johnny knows what he is supposed to do in this portion of The Game, and neither do we. There is no goal to accomplish aside from not getting killed by the criminally insane people who have been sent there. And why does Parmistan send all of its criminally insane to a walled-in city? He just wanders around, fighting off his attackers until he eventually gets out.

The Game was apparently created by the Khan, who was one of my favorite characters. He is supposed to be the great ruler of Parmistan, however, he is



The ninjas are coming for you.



Note the well-placed pommel horse.

much more of a clown. He's small, with a crazy combover, and bears an uncanny resemblance to Mel Brooks. The people of Parmistan are also another wonder of this movie. They all appear to be old and toothless, and, oddly, English seems to be their native language despite the fact that Parmistan is located not far from the Caspian Sea.

Gymkata was billed as a martial arts movie that combines "the skill of gymnastics and the kill of Karate." Kurt Thomas is an accomplished gymnast and was a member of the 1976 Olympic team. However, he is not much of an actor, and he earned a Razzie nomination for Worst New Star in this role.

While his acting was tedious to watch, Thomas' gymnastics and athletic feats were pretty impressive. In [a 2015 interview](#) Thomas said he had a stunt man all throughout filming, but he only used the stunt man once. When asked about the random gymnastics peppered throughout he said, "Yeah, from time to time, the producers would just ask me what I could do physically that would look good on film – and they simply ended

up incorporating most of them into the movie."

Gymkata was directed by Robert Clouse, who directed several Bruce Lee movies including *Enter the Dragon* 12 years earlier. For a director with some serious martial arts movies under his belt, this must have been a pretty low blow.

Critical reception of this movie was pretty bad, but it has gained a cult following due to its terribleness. The AV Club deemed it "[a masterpiece of unintentional comedy.](#)" If you like bad movies, this one is a classic. If you watch it, take note of the people of Parmistan and their terrible Uncle Fester make-up. It is definitely an underrated star in this film.

As part of a partnership between Warner Home Video and Amazon.com that gave movie fans a chance to vote for their favorite titles to be distributed on DVD, *Gymkata* was re-released in 2006. Apparently, there are enough fans of *Gymkata* to make that happen.

FIND THIS MOVIE: Available to rent online, or buy the DVD on Amazon.

SKATERS IN THE COLD WAR: GLEAMING THE CUBE

1989 • Screenplay by Michael Tolkin • Directed by Graeme Clifford • Essay by Janene Scelza

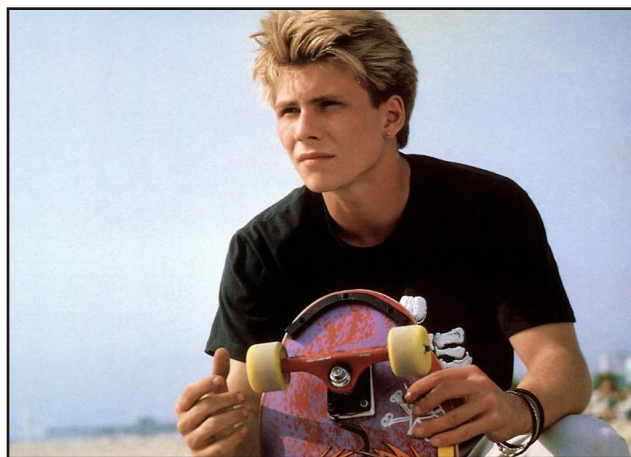
Gleaming the Cube – a.k.a. *Skate or Die* (no relation to the NES game) and *A Brother's Justice* – is in a category all its own when it comes to movies about skateboarding. The story of the young, alienated man avenging the death of his brother at the hands of a ruthless arms dealer is something more like you'd find in 80s urban martial arts movies (cue the pan flute and fog machine!) or "America, Fuck Yeah!" uber-patriotic fare like *Red Dawn*, but a lot less bloody. *Gleaming the Cube* is about as corny as those kind of movies, too. The title song especially sounds like the extended theme for a sitcom. And, Christian Slater really hams it up in the lead as our skate hero, Brian Kelly.

Still, *Gleaming the Cube* is a classic as far as skateboarding movies go. Shot in the Motherland of Southern California, it showcases old pros, old boards, and old tricks. Because Powell Peralta's co-founder, Stacey Peralta, served as second unit director and technical advisor, many of the [Bones Brigade](#) team show up in the movie. Tommy Guerrero and Tony Hawk (with his trademark McSqueeb) were even cast in major roles, as Sam and Buddy, two friends in Brian's inner circle. Needless to say, the skateboarding sequences are top notch, which includes a *Footloose*-esque skate-your-anger-away freestyle scene!

And although the movie has its somber moments, *Gleaming the Cube* fits so

perfectly in the Bones Brigade's typically irreverent catalog, which includes far dopier movies like *The Search for Animal Chin*, *Future Primitive*, and even one of the *Police Academy* movies.

But *Gleaming the Cube* isn't just for skateboard enthusiasts. It's the kind of super cheesy 80s movies you watch with friends and riff mercilessly. After all, even Christian Slater can barely keep a straight face during the movie.



Christian Skater.

Slater's Brian Kelly is the textbook skater. He's an underachieving, angsty punk teenager who doesn't have much faith in adults. The only thing he seems to excel at – and care about – is skateboarding. And Brian has mastered every kind: street, vert, freestyle, and even downhill. (Somebody call the sponsors!) "It's something I can do by myself without anybody judging me," he



Detective Lucero is on the case! (More or less...)

explains, though Slater recites the line with a grimace.

The movie opens with Brian and his skater friends bribing a pilot to fly them around So Cal in a private jet as they search for a vacant backyard pool to skate. They strike gold, but their skate session is abruptly cut short when Brian's buddy, Yabbo (Max Perlich, who could actually skate), slams pretty hard. The homeowner and the cops are called out to the scene, leaving Brian in hot water with his folks. Brian's dad (played by the magnificent Ed Lauter) is tired of his son's shenanigans and wonders why he can't be more like his straight-laced adopted Vietnamese brother, Vinh (Art Chudabala).

Brian and Vinh are like night and day, although they seem to tolerate each other's existence. Vinh gets good grades, has a girlfriend (Min Luong as Tina), and works for Tina's father, Colonel Trac (Le Tuan) as a

shipping clerk for an anti-communist relief fund in Vietnam.

One day at work, Vinh is reviewing invoices and discovers some unusual discrepancies in shipping weights. He brings it to his boss's attention, suggesting that the shipping warehouse, Westpac Medical Supplies (WMS) might be ripping them off (way to jump to conclusions, Vinh!). To his surprise, the Colonel dismisses it as a possible clerical error and fires him on the spot, saying that Vinh is wasting too much time on orders that have already been processed, and maybe it would be better to hire someone with more experience.

Vinh can't figure out where he went wrong and decides to do a little investigating. One night, he sneaks into the WMS warehouse searching for who the hell knows what to validate his suspicions that the company is involved in something shady. But, he is



The “just watched the ‘89 NFC game” look.

caught by the owner, Ed Lawndale (Richard Herd) and his hired goon, Bobby Nguyen (Peter Kwong). The pair take Vinh to the hotel across the street from the Happiest Place on Earth, where they try to torture him for information about who he is working for.

Colonel Trac, summoned by Lawndale, arrives on the scene, pleading with them to let Vinh go because he’s just a harmless kid and not the criminal mastermind they seem to think he is. But, it’s too late. Vinh is dead, and Lawndale, the Colonel, and Bobby Nguyen flee the scene, making it look like a suicide.

Brian has a hard time coping with Vinh’s death. He doesn’t believe that his brother would check himself into a motel to kill himself, something he tries to explain to the cool, non-nonsense detective on the case, Al Lucero (Steve Bauer). Lucero is only willing to entertain this theory because Vinh never registered at the hotel where he was found. But, without any hard evidence to support Brian’s theory, there isn’t much Lucero can really do to help, leaving Brian no choice but to go it alone.

The only clue Vinh left behind was the piece of paper with the suspect shipping



Lawndale, the well-dressed hostage-taker.

weights scribbled in Vietnamese and the letters WMS written in big, bold letters. Always resourceful, Brian scouts people in the Vietnamese part of town to translate Vinh’s writing. But, in doing so, he accidentally tips off Bobby Nguyen, who in turn alerts Lawndale, who would have gotten away with it if it hadn’t been for these pesky kids! Lawndale sends his hip young hitman out after Brian.

Piecing together clues, while trying to fend off Lawndale’s goons, Brian figures out that Colonel Trac is somehow involved in Vinh’s death. Brian tries to befriend Tina to covertly gather evidence on her father, but she won’t give him the time of day, saying her father won’t let her date American boys, and certainly not a skate punk like Brian. (You’d think that with his extracurricular activities like weapons smuggling and homicide, he’d lighten up a little). So, Brian chops off his spikes (in a scene that looks [inspired by *The Terminator*](#)), ditches his board, and digs through the closet to emerge as a J. Crew model on a beach cruiser. Then he takes a night off from crime fighting to take Tina to the movies and ask too many questions about her father.



Brian and his pals prepare to take out the Noid.

The movie culminates in a huge chase sequence, and it's all so beautifully-over-the-top. Like William Wallace charging into battle with his men, Brian, now back in skater form, leads his blindly loyal rag tag team of skate friends to Colonel Trac, where Lawndale, the gun-toting arms dealer is taking hostages. The omniscient Detective Lucero is also not far behind. And of course, the good guys prevail. You're welcome, America.

Gleaming the Cube is an utterly ridiculous movie, good skate stunts or no. It probably goes without saying that it bombed at the box office, recouping only about a quarter of what it cost to make.

Prior to the film's release, the *L.A. Times* [weirdly praised the film](#) for its rare, sensitive treatment of Vietnamese characters, who, in the 80s, had mostly been reserved for macho American war movies like *Rambo*.

Le Tuan, who played Colonel Trac, was even optimistic that the skateboarding aspect of the movie would make *Gleaming the Cube* a commercial success, and that the Vietnamese people would "ride the coattail of that success." Oh, what a movie to pin your hopes on.

Frankly, I think the movie would have made a much better classic arcade game. One where you could play Brian, skating through one level after the next, collecting clues about Vinh's death while fighting off henchmen and stage bosses, sometimes with the help of his skate crew. And in the end, Brian would have to battle Lawndale to save Tina. Does this kind of thing already exist? Please email me if it does.

FIND THIS MOVIE: Available on DVD or rent it online. Desperate viewers can also find poor quality bootlegs on YouTube.

GIRLS. ON FILM

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