

ISSUE #6 OCT 2019

# GIRLS, ON FILM

HOPELESSLY DEVOTED TO 80'S MOVIES

**THE ROLE** **HUNK**

CAN'T BUY ME LOVE

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM

**SOUL MAN** **REVERSAL**

DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN

**BIG**

**MR. MOM** **ISSUE**

CAN'T BUY ME LOVE



## GIRLS, ON FILM ISSUE #6, OCT 2019

### ESSAYS BY

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# THE ROLE REVERSAL ISSUE

## A LOOK AT 80'S MOVIES THAT PULL THE OL' SWITCHEROO

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## ABOUT GIRLS, ON FILM

Hello! Thanks for checking out the sixth issue of *Girls, on Film*! We are girls (and sometimes honorary girls) who write about 80's movies, and not just the so-called "chick flicks."

For every issue, we pick a theme. Then we select a handful of movies to discuss related to that theme. We cover all kinds of topics and all kinds of 80's movies. In past issues, we have discovered 80's movies about music, sports, summer, food, and most recently, working. (You can access all back issues for free at [girlsonfilmzine.com](http://girlsonfilmzine.com)).

## ABOUT ISSUE #6

In this issue, we are pulling the ol' switcheroo and focusing on one of the 80's most over-done genres: role-reversal comedies. By that, we mean comedies about people who take on a completely different persona. The movies we selected for this issue involve everything from gender-benders, to body-transformations, mistaken identity, blackface, and of course, social pariahs mingling with the cool kids. We picked the following:

### JUST ONE OF THE GUYS (1987)

An aspiring high school journalist suspects her submission for a writing contest is rejected on sexist grounds. To prove it, she poses as a boy at



a neighboring school.

### MR. MOM (1983)

John Hughes lampoons the nuclear family in this story about a furloughed auto plant executive (Michael Keaton) who plays stay-at-home mom while his wife goes back to work.

### DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN (1985)

Madonna stars in this stylish Punk/New Wave caper about a bored housewife who's curiosity causes her to be mistakenly pursued by a hit-man.

### HUNK (1987)

An unlikable nerd transforms into an unlikable hunk in an ungraceful attempt to mock yuppies.

### CAN'T BUY ME LOVE (1987)

Eager to become popular, a high school nerd (Patrick Dempsey) makes a deal with the head cheerleader to pretend that they're dating for a month and then stage a very public break-up.

### BIG (1988)

A boy transforms into Tom Hanks after he discovering a fortune teller machine at a carnival and makes a wish to be big.

### SOUL MAN (1986)

C. Thomas Howell in blackface. 'Nuff said.





### DREAM A LITTLE DREAM (1989)

The Coreys™ star in a bizarre mix of body-switch comedy and After School Special when an obnoxious teenager falls for his friend's girlfriend.

## ABOUT THE GIRLS

*Girls, on Film* is Stephanie McDevitt, Kim Robinson, and Janene Scelza. We welcome guest writers! (Email us for more info).

### STEPHANIE MCDEVITT (CO-FOUNDER)

Stephanie's one big disappointment in life is that she wasn't old enough to fully appreciate popular clothing styles in the 80's, as she was mostly attired in paisley sweatsuits. A full-time editor and occasional freelancer, Stephanie looks nostalgically back on 80's films such as *Ernest Goes to Camp*, *Adventures in Babysitting*, and *Can't Buy Me Love* and wishes she could pull off the hairdos of Cindy Mancini and her friends.

### JANENE SCELZA (CO-FOUNDER)

Janene has written a buttload of zines over the years and introduced Stephanie and Kim to the craft. Janene spent her teen years combing musty video stores for all the 80's movies she could find. There were lists... She's got plenty of favorites from the decade, but its stylish indie films like *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *Repo Man*,



and *Terminator* that she loves best.

### ED CASH (GUEST WRITER)

Ed is using a pseudonym. His name has been changed to protect the innocent. He's pretty darn excited to jump into the role-reversal theme and write the first article by a guy for *Girls, On Film*. He is an actual guy and insists that Phil Collins was the coolest cat of the 80's.

### ANGELICA COMPTON (GUEST WRITER)

Angelica honed her love of 80's film by watching Saturday afternoon B-movies and exploring the local video store. This is her first contribution to *Girls, On Film*.

### KIM ROBINSON (REGULAR WRITER)

Kim got a tape stuck in the VCR and will return for Issue #7.

## GET HOPELESSLY DEVOTED

*Girls, on Film* publishes quarterly. All issues are available for free online. Print editions are available to buy at events and select bookstores. Check out our website for more info and be sure to sign up for the newsletter!

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## ESSAY BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

### MOVIE DETAILS

Release Date: April 26,  
1985

Written by: Dennis  
Feldman, and Jeff  
Franklin

Directed by: Lisa  
Gottlieb

### WATCH IT NOW

Streaming on Amazon  
Prime.

## MEN TAKE UP SPACE: JUST ONE OF THE GUYS

*Just One of the Guys* is a gender-bending teen comedy that explores traditional gender roles and constraints. The movie sets us up for a message about sexism and gender equality, but what we actually get is a look at what happens when societal norms are pushed aside and ideas about how boys and girls should interact are disrupted. I like this movie. It's not an amazing film, but it's an interesting take on teenage romance, and it's something a bit different from regular teen love stories.

*Just One of the Guys* follows Terry Griffith (Joyce Hyser), who seemingly has it all: looks, smarts, popularity, and a hunky college boyfriend. When she learns that the Sun Tribune is holding a contest for a high school student with the best article, she is sure she will win a summer internship with the paper. However, Terry's teacher decides to submit articles that were written by two guys, which means she doesn't even get a chance to compete.

Convinced that sexism is at play, Terry sets out to prove that if she were a guy the teacher would have submitted her article. So, while her parents are conveniently out of town, Terry cuts her hair, changes up her wardrobe, and enrolls at a neighboring high school posing as male. However, when she meets with the advisor of the paper at the new high school, he tells her he



BUDDY TEACHES TERRY HOW TO ACT LIKE A GUY.

won't submit her article because it's boring. She has a week to come up with something better.

So, Terry decides to see her plan through and pose as a guy for the week. This leads to all sorts of hijinks, including figuring out how to use the bathroom when, for some reason, none of the stalls in the men's room have doors; setting off the fire alarm so she doesn't have to change in the locker room; and fighting off the advances of Sandy (Sherilyn Fenn), the girl who falls for Terry. In addition to all this, Terry has to deal with Greg, the school's bully, played by everyone's favorite 80's villain, William Zabka.



ALWAYS A BULLY.

On her second day at the new school, Terry makes friends with Rick (Clayton Rohner), a shy, quiet guy who keeps to himself. Terry decides to make it her mission to find him a date to the prom, which coincidentally falls at the end of Terry's week-long experiment. She updates his wardrobe and makes him try a new hairstyle all while encouraging him to ask girls to the dance. The only problem? Terry starts to fall for Rick.

Well, Rick is eventually successful in securing a prom date, and Terry, clad in a tuxedo with her best friend Denise (Toni Hudson) posing as her date, is forced to watch Rick dance with another girl. Since this scene comes at the end of the movie, you can probably guess that something happens to force Terry's hand and reveal her scam. This story would make for a hell of a newspaper article! Just a quick reminder: all of this happened in a week.

*Just One of the Guys* used to run on Comedy Central all the time when I was growing up, so I've seen it several times. However, as a kid, I never really caught on to the major plot hole in this movie. There is no doubt that Terry is the victim of sexism but not in terms of the contest. Teachers in both schools tell her they won't submit her article because it's boring. The movie could have ended right there.

Instead, the movie continues with Terry's social experiment, and the filmmakers provide commentary on gender roles by pairing Terry up with several different forms of masculinity—her sex-crazed younger brother, the controlling older boyfriend, the preppy school bully, and the sensitive quiet type. We see her bounce between all of these male characters, and in turn, Terry (be it the male or female version of Terry) is forced to adapt in order to deal with each one.

Terry's scenes with Buddy (Billy Jacoby), her horny younger brother, are some of the best in the movie. Buddy spends the whole movie trying to get laid, and he seems to have little dignity when it comes to begging for sex. Terry, in return, tells him that sex should be with someone you love and scolds him for objectifying women. Terry as the older sister and pseudo moral compass to Buddy's sex fiend lunacy plays well, although I would not have been as lenient on my brother, or any guy for that matter, for the way Buddy views women.

When Terry poses as male, she plays the best friend role with Rick. However, as Terry starts to fall for Rick, there are several times when she almost blows her cover. At one point she brushes his hair back and he looks both startled and con-



fused. Confused because he liked it, or confused because guys don't do that? We don't know. Her relationship with Rick raises questions about male friendships and appropriate ways to act together. [1] Towards the end, when he finds out she has a boyfriend, he thinks that Terry is gay, which would explain some of Terry's behavior. Refreshingly, Rick says he doesn't care.

Terry's interactions with Kevin the boyfriend and Greg the bully are in stark contrast to her relationship with Rick. They are both muscle-bound blondes and they represent stifling patriarchal ideas. When Terry is with Kevin, she reacts to his chauvinism as most women would, she snaps back and uses her words. When she's posing as male with Greg, she is forced to resort to other coping mechanisms because she's physically afraid of him.



RICK WITH MALE TERRY.

The whole movie is based on Terry interacting with these male characters and changing her role to fit the situation. Her ability to shift between male and female and adapt as she goes from one guy to the next takes apart the idea that boys and girls are supposed to behave in a certain way with each other. Gender roles be damned!

Even more interesting is the conclusion of Rick and Terry's relationship. When Rick finds out that Terry is not gay but actually a woman, he's obviously angry, but he eventually comes around and they get together. Rick never spent time with female Terry, he only knew Terry as a guy. For Rick to decide to give Terry a chance means that, on some level, he fell for Terry despite her



RICK WITH FEMALE TERRY.

assumed gender and, even more important, that Rick can accept that. For an 80's teen comedy (or really any teen comedy), that is a pretty big deal. Although I thought the filmmakers took away from their point when, immediately after this scene, Rick insists on driving.

Apparently, this movie had a huge impact on gay and transgendered women at the time. In 2010 director Lisa Gottlieb did a live chat on Jezebel (she joined as a commenter, so you can still read it, but you have to scroll through the 291 comments to the original article). [2] She said, "I would say the most interesting and surprising thing I learned about *Just One of the Guys* is the huge influence it had on young gay and transgender women...For hours, women posted their stories and I was genuinely moved." [3]

Speaking of Gottlieb, not only was she the film's director, but she also did several rewrites of the script with her writing partner, Mitch Giannunzio. [4] Gottlieb wrote many of the scenes in which Terry is objecting to sexism, and Giannunzio wrote most of the scenes involving Buddy. Producers refused to give them writing credits on the movie, and they didn't even invite Giannunzio to the wrap party. Rude.

While not the best movie to come out of the 80's, *Just One of the Guys* is definitely worth checking out if only because it differs from the popular John Hughes-type teen romances. In addition to that, it has a great supporting cast. You can find the movie on Amazon for rent or buy, and I'm sure it still occasionally plays on cable.



## ESSAY BY ANGELICA COMPTON

### MOVIE DETAILS

Release Date: August  
19, 1983

Written by: John  
Hughes

Directed by: Stan  
Dragoti

### WATCH IT NOW

Streaming on Hulu  
and Amazon Prime.

## A MAN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOME: MR. MOM

*Mr. Mom* is a comedic look at what happens to a young family when a wife steps back into the workforce, and a husband suddenly finds himself running the household. The film plays off gender stereotypes for laughs but has an underlying feminist message.

*Mr. Mom* begins on a morning with the Butlers, a middle-class family in their suburban Detroit home, complete with white picket fence. Wife Caroline (Teri Garr) cheerfully rouses her husband, Jack (Michael Keaton), and three young children. She makes them breakfast, and then Jack heads off to work with his carpool colleagues. But as soon as Jack gets in the car with Jinx (Jeffrey Tambor), Larry (Christopher Lloyd), and Stan (Tom Leopold), his demeanor changes. There's trouble at work for these auto executives. By the end of the day, Jinx furloughs all of them.

When Caroline suggests that both she and Jack should look for jobs, Jack finds it absurd. Of course, Caroline finds a job in advertising almost immediately, setting up the head of household role reversal that is the core of the film. At work, Caroline enters a world quite different from her home. Her co-workers are skeptical of her experience, and her boss, Ron Richard-





JACK MAKES A WAGER.

son (Martin Mull), seems to find her appealing in an unprofessional and creepy way.

Meanwhile, Jack tackles his new tasks, like a disastrous trip to the grocery store involving an angry mob of women at the meat counter and a price check on maxi-pads. He also loses his kids in the store, only to find the baby with Caroline's friend Joan (Ann Jillian), a much too friendly divorcee who is obviously interested in Jack.

When Ron arrives at the Butler home in a limo early one morning to take Caroline on a business trip, Jack feels threatened. He greets Ron wearing overalls and carrying a chainsaw and informs him that he's adding a wing to the house. This sets up one of the film's funniest and most quotable lines when Ron asks Jack if he is putting in a 220-volt electrical line. Jack, having no idea what Ron is talking about, responds "220, 221. Whatever it takes." In an interview with David Letterman, Michael Keaton recounted that it was Martin Mull who fed him that line. It wasn't in the



JACK CRANKS UP THE MANLINESS.

original script. [1]

Things don't get better for the Butlers. Ron makes his romantic intentions toward Caroline known, and Jack faces a host of over-the-top troubles taking care of the kids and keeping the house clean. Jack eventually enters a downward spiral, as evidenced by the fact that he grows a beard, wears the same flannel shirt every day, and really gets into soap operas. Jack also gets close to Joan.

When Jack hosts a ladies poker night, it prompts a significant fight with Caroline and sets up the first of two scenes that try to get to the dramatic heart of this role reversal. Jack tells Caroline that he didn't think it would be so hard to stay home. She responds that she's been there, but pride got her through. Despite the honest conversation, Jack spends the night on the couch.



JACK MAKES SOME MORE WAGERS.

The fight is followed by a dream sequence based on Jack's new soap opera addiction in which Joan comes to seduce Jack, Jinx calls him back to work, and Ron whisks Caroline away. The dream has an effect. The theme from Rocky plays over a montage in which Jack shaves, paints the white picket fence, and burns the flannel shirt.

When Caroline wins a pitch for a major tuna ad, she has to fly to California with Ron to film the commercial. This sets up the second dramatic scene that addresses the reversed roles. It's Halloween and Caroline is about to leave for her flight. Jack pleads with her not to go, telling her she'll miss the holiday and the kids are only



CAROLINA MAKES A TUNA PITCH.

young once. He asks her about their relationship status. She's torn but leaves with Ron, and Joan shows up at Jack's side moments later. The film wraps up rather predictably after that

*Mr. Mom* was a groundbreaking and commercially successful film. [2] According to the Pretty in Podcast, *Mr. Mom* episode, the film was one of the first to feature a stay-at-home dad. [3] Other films had explored single dads or widowed fathers, but none had focused on a two parent family where the husband stayed home and the wife worked. Despite the novel premise, many reviews of the film at the time were not favorable.

Roger Ebert felt the idea was good, but fell short by relying on gimmicks, when it could have focused on more everyday experiences. [4] He said it felt "made up and artificial." Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* expressed a similar sentiment. [5] She felt that the film had potential, but relied only on "predictable developments" involving Jack in silly situations with the kids.

As a child in the 80's, I thought the film was hilarious, though most of my memories are focused on the Michael Keaton story line. The Teri Garr scenes did not register. The Butler kids have a lot of freedoms with Jack as a parent, and the funny scenes at school, at the grocery store, and in the home appealed to kids. I especially loved the scenes where Jack was forced to compete against Ron in a bizarre little obstacle course at Caroline's company picnic.

Watching today is a little different. As an adult, the struggles faced by Teri Garr are much more relevant. It is hard to watch how initially unsupportive Jack is of Caroline getting a job. Times have changed, thank goodness, and this is no longer an unusual situation, so it makes Jack come off as even more of a jerk than may have originally been intended.

The conclusion of the film is problematic too. It may have originally worked, but is now a glaring missed opportunity. For all its work to explore reversed gender roles within a marriage, the film loses its feminist message when Jack gets his job back and Caroline quits, mainly because of repeated sexual harassment by her boss. According to the Pretty in Podcast episode on *Mr. Mom*, two early versions of John Hughes's scripts had the film end with the gender roles still reversed, and explored some darker themes that critics of the time and audiences of today might have found more appealing. [6]



THE GANG'S ALL HERE.

Maybe it is a bit of nostalgia, but overall I still think it is an enjoyable 80's family comedy. Teri Garr and Michael Keaton are fun to watch on screen. The complications of the role reversal are so light and over the top too, that you know that nothing terrible is going to happen to the Butlers. You can relax and enjoy the film knowing that the family will be okay in the end. It's light, amusing, and worth a watch to see the large supporting cast, many of whom were fixtures in movies throughout the 80's and are well-known for other roles today.



## ESSAY BY JANENE SCELZA

### MOVIE DETAILS

Release Date: April 12,  
1985

Written by: Leora  
Barish

Directed by: Susan  
Seidelman

### WATCH IT NOW

Rent or buy online.

# THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN

A few years ago, *Vogue* interviewed director Susan Seidelman about her 1982 punk comedy, *Smithereens*. Her feature film debut, which was being restored for 35mm print, told of an unfulfilled Jersey girl who goes to New York to be famous despite a lack of talent. The story, Seidelman said, was inspired by *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and the idea that “a young woman could go somewhere and re-create herself, that she could live the life she imagined she wanted to live.” [1]

Reinvention -- and more specifically, reinvention of female characters -- is a familiar theme in Seidelman's work, particularly her 80's films. That's especially true of her second film, *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Bored housewife Roberta Glass (Rosanna Arquette) becomes fixated on the free-spirited titular character, Susan (Madonna). But, Roberta doesn't just reinvent herself to be more like Susan. Through a combination of mistaken identity and temporary amnesia, Roberta becomes Susan.

The stylish caper comedy borrowed heavily from the 1974 French film, *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, which in turn was inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (there are many references to Carroll's tale in both films). Roberta is Alice and Susan is her White Rabbit. The housewife's curiosity



leads her down the rabbit hole to a Lower East Side wonderland (cue the David Peel anthem) at a time when the weirdos still thrived. It's a world that is a little bit punk and a little New Wave and its silly chaos changes Roberta's life.

It's a world much different from yuppie Fort Lee, where Roberta lives with her hot tub salesman husband, Gary (Mark Blum). She is close with Gary's sister, Leslie (the excellent Laurie Metcalf), who relishes the lifestyle. But, Roberta prefers to lose herself in the imagined excitement and romance of *The Personals*.



ROBERTA AND LESLIE READ THE PERSONALS.

She takes particular interest in casual lovers Jim (Robert Joy) and Susan (Madonna), who frequently reconnect through *The Personals*. While reading the paper with Leslie at a supremely art deco hair salon, Roberta notices Jim's latest message: desperately seeking Susan, to meet him in Battery Park.

Most people in this movie are desperately seeking Susan. She is smart and sexual and completely unfettered, traits that make her alluring but also a magnet for trouble. Her and Roberta's worlds become entangled when Susan accidentally gets mixed up with an albino hitman.

When we first see Susan, she is leaving a snoozing mobster's hotel room just as the hitman (Will Patton) arrives. He's come for the mobster (Richard Hell, in a non-speaking part) and a stolen pair of earrings, which Susan. He takes note of her unusual jacket.

Roberta spies on Jim and Susan during their



THE JACKET HEARD ROUND THE WORLD.

brief reunion the next day in Battery Park. Jim is leaving for a gig upstate when Susan shows him a newspaper article about the mobster's murder. He worries about her safety, but she is unfazed. When he leaves, Roberta follows Susan to a thrift shop in the Village where she swaps her jacket for a pair of boots. Roberta buys the jacket.

When Roberta takes the jacket home, she discovers a Port Authority locker key (remember those?!) in the pocket, and reaches out to Susan through *The Personals* to return it to her. A desperately seeking stranger seeking Susan to meet her in Battery Park. Jim also sees the ad (because these *Personal* ads get statewide circulation for some reason) and, worried it might have something to do with the murdered mobster, summons his buddy, Dez (Aidan Quinn), to check it out. Dez doesn't know what Susan looks like, so Jim describes the jacket she always wears.

Of course, the jacket becomes the source of all the confusion for the characters involved in this little mystery. Roberta shows up to Battery Park wearing it and is suddenly confronted by the albino hitman who thinks she is Susan. Susan sees them, but is hauled away by the cops before she can reach Roberta because she stiffed her cab driver. Dez arrives just in time to see Roberta struggling to escape the hitman. She is knocked out and can't remember anything. Dez is by her side, calling her name: Susan.

Dez, aware of Susan's reputation, reluctantly offers to help Roberta, including giving her a place to stay while she recovers. Aside from the blonde hair and the iconic jacket, Roberta isn't



GARY GETS STONED, REMAINS SQUARE.

much like Susan. She's timid and often unsure of herself, and finds this new little world quite unusual. But, as Roberta uncovers little bits of Susan's life, she also adopts her persona and hip thrift store fashion sense.

Gary's own detective work leads him to Susan, who agrees to help him. Seidelman's women tend to be the brains of the story while the men fumble around a few steps behind. It sometimes makes the men endearingly dopey, like Jim and Dez. Gary, on the other hand, is a complete schmuck. It turns out that the Spa King of New Jersey doesn't really know his wife, and he even admits to having a "respectable" affair. It's hard to imagine what Roberta ever saw in him. (She, as Susan, starts to fall for Dez). Worse, Gary is totally out of his element in Susan's world.

Naturally, Susan takes charge. Once she figures out that Roberta's involvement is merely accidental, she doesn't abandon the effort to find her. She becomes the centralizing force for everyone involved, guiding Roberta, Gary, Dez, and Jim in one way or another to the low-rent Vaudeville club where Roberta gets a job (check out young John Turturro as the club owner). Gary, Jim, and Dez puzzle over their lovers' identities, while Roberta and Susan fend off the hitman and emerge, victorious. (Some DVD releases contain the original *Ishtar*-style ending).

*Desperately Seeking Susan* is my all-time favorite 80's movie and I highly recommend checking it out. The silly chain of events feel like something out of the 1950's, but the story unfolds in a quirky 80's playground.



V.I.L.E. HENCHMEN DETECTED!

Seidelman's cult hit recently screened along with *Smithereens* at the Barbican in London as part of a film series of films from "New York's coolest era." [2] These movies give us a glimpse of the city as it was before the whitewash of gentrification. And it was long before the whitewashing of the stories, too. Other than the Fort Lee set, the characters in *Desperately Seeking Susan* weren't monied. They weren't unhappy, either. Modern films and TV shows based in New York City now celebrate Gary's ilk.

The movie was the sleeper hit of 1985 and was the first US-produced independent feature selected for Cannes that year. [3] Madonna was fairly unknown when she was cast in the movie. Big names were tossed around to play Susan, including Melanie Griffith, who might have been great in the role. Rosanna Arquette, a rising star at the time, also auditioned for the part. Seidelman lobbied for Madonna, her neighbor at the time, saying she was perfect for the part. And the rest was history.

Indeed, Madonna had undergone her own reinvention, telling *Vanity Fair* that she was once the lonely girl who was searching for something different. "I wasn't rebellious in a certain way. I cared about being good at something. I didn't shave my underarms and I didn't wear make-up like normal girls do. But I studied and I got good grades... I wanted to be somebody." [4] Her debut album, *Like a Virgin* released a few months before the movie hit theaters and propelled her into superstardom.



## ESSAY BY ED CASH

### MOVIE DETAILS

Release Date:  
March 6, 1987

Written by: Lawrence  
Bassoff

Directed by: Lawrence  
Bassoff

### WATCH IT NOW

Look for bootlegs on  
Youtube.

# YUCKY YUPPIES: HUNK

*Hunk* is a bad movie. And it's not enjoyable-bad, it's just bad.

I was not a hunk as a teenager. I wonder if this movie would have appealed to me more back then. It's custom-made to feed adolescent fantasy: Bradley is a sort-of-dork who is too smart for his programming job but also too lazy to write that million-dollar program that his boss demands. Bradley's girlfriend has just dumped him to elope with her aerobics instructor, and Bradley spends his days daydreaming about women and money.

Bradley wants to be a hunk. A demon appears and promises to make him a hunk. He makes a deal and becomes a hunk. Being a hunk brings him sex and wealth. He realizes that being a hunk is not all it's cracked up to be.

What is a "hunk" anyway? Merriam Webster [1] defines it as, "a large lump, piece, or portion" (e.g., "eat a hunk o' this cheese."). Its etymology may stem from the West Flemish word *hunke* [2], used for bread, meat, and hopefully cheese. (West Flemish is spoken where Belgium, France, and the Netherlands collide. UNESCO lists it as a vulnerable language. So in other words, *Hunk* the movie is partially culpable for cultural extermination). *Hunke* itself may derive from the Dutch *homp* ("lump," "chunk"). In



Norwegian, a homp is a knoll. Etymologists have speculated that the English "hunk" also relates to "hunch" [3] ("a thick piece"). Interestingly enough, "hunk" can also describe a safe haven in a children's game, hence the phrase "hunky dory."

Because people are routinely terrible, "hunk" and "hunky" entered the American vocabulary in the late 19th century as a slur against Hungarian (and, eventually, pretty much any Slavic or Eastern European) immigrants. Another version, BoHunk— for "Bohemian-Hungarian"—sounds more like a SoHo fashion fad. Cecil Adams of *The Straight Dope* has tied the slur-version of "hunk" to "honky" though University of Illinois at Chicago professor Tom Kochman also noted the Wolof (dominant language of Senegal, The Gambia, and Mauritania) term honq ("pink," "red") was frequently used by Africans to describe white people. [4]



THE TICKET TO HUNK-DOM!

Strangely enough, the 1987 film *Hunk* does not delve deeply into these complex dimensions of the word "hunk." Instead, it opts to explore yet another use of the word—to describe an attractive, muscular man. According to the otherwise unsourced Internet Etymology Dictionary, Australians claim the earliest recorded use of "hunk" as slang for an attractive man, dating to 1941. American jive talk picked up the lingo by 1945. [5] It's unclear if the slang use of "hunk" for a sexy dude derives from a guy literally being a "piece," or if it emerged because people in the 40s decided that nobody is more buff and hot than a Hungarian. Maybe it's a bit of both.

Back to the movie. It sucks. A typical Faustian



BORING DUDES. NEEDS MORE DEVIL.

tale unfolds. A flimsy premise sends Bradley to the posh beach community of Seaspray. The cartoonishly bad-guy yuppie elite who are ensconced there reject him, of course. He makes his deal with the devil (actually, a sultry proxy demon named O'Brien), and he wakes up as Hunk Golden (no really, that's the name he takes). Physical beauty (and supernatural strength, via devilish assistance) are all it takes to secure the sex, wealth, and status that Bradley/Hunk craves.

All the bullies get their comeuppance. All the shallow yuppie women lust after him. All the yuppies latch on to his rising tide. Hunkiness soon proves to not be everything that Bradley hoped it would be. The climax approaches—will Bradley serve Satan to live forever as Hunk?—and resolves with little surprise or twist. The movie ends, and you curse yourself for wasting your time. You are worse off for having endured this garbage.

*Hunk* sneers at yuppies for their obsession with the superficial—money, sex, materiality, the usual suspects. Bradley wants in to the yuppie elite.



MARVEL THE DIGS AT CONSUMERIST CULTURE!



THE CURIOUS BOND: CHOCHKA & THE YUPPIES.

He's grown sick and tired of his only moderately successful and comfortable life, which he hasn't done much to actually earn. But the movie offers no compelling alternative to the vapid yuppie life that Bradley desires. Our "hero" learns little and grows even less, if at all, through his adventure.



THE LOVE STORY THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN.

Bradley is lame, but I found little reason to like any of the characters. A few show glimmers of what might have been. Cynthia Sziget's Chochka is a big-personality, all-her-own-style kleptomaniac who immediately makes it a point to befriend young Bradley. She inexplicably holds court with the obnoxiously shallow crowd that Bradley wants to join. She is also immediately entranced by Hunk Golden. I guess she's just as shallow and sex-crazed as the others. But she's a chubby Jewish gal, so it's (supposed to be) comic relief! And then she essentially disappears from the film.

The criminally underutilized James Coco does what he can to make an interesting devil, insufferably called "Dr. D," and heroically makes the



BEST PART: JAMES COCO IN GOOFY COSTUMES.

most of delivering the garbage writing ("Oh, to heaven with you!") The demon-gal O'Brien gets a ludicrous reveal to her true identity. Otherwise she's pretty forgettable and, like everyone else in the film, deserving of no sympathy whatsoever.

Story and characters aside, there is no joy to be found in the mechanics of the film. The soundtrack goes from schlock to unmemorable and back. The cuts are stilted, janky, and uncomfortably long for no apparent reason. The actors recite their lines without chemistry or conviction. The setting is drab. The narrative emerges through telling, not showing.

As the movie lurches to its inevitable and insipid moral, you'll suffer through Bradley's empty platitudes ("Don't be afraid to be the person who you are inside." UGH.) Bradley has done nothing to earn even these hollow words. And yet he still gets his happy ending. The world of *Hunk* is not fair.

This was one of distributor Crown International Picture's last in a long history of B- and C-movies. They probably should have just closed shop. For what it's worth, Brad Pitt makes his first appearance on film as an extra in one of the early beach scenes. So I suppose there's some history here.

Did you enjoy this movie? I can't imagine why. If you really must, you can probably still pay to watch *Hunk* on Amazon Video like I did. You'll also likely find a bootleg on Youtube, because nobody should care about pirating this garbage.



## ESSAY BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

### MOVIE DETAILS

Release Date:  
August 14, 1987

Written by: Michael  
Swerdlick

Directed by: Steve  
Rash

### WATCH IT NOW

Rent or buy online.

# SOMETHING STINKS IN SUBURBIA: CAN'T BUY ME LOVE

*Can't Buy Me Love's* role reversal comes as a high school nerd trying to break into the popular crowd. It's a common theme in movies centered around high school kids, but this one throws in a twist when the nerd decides to rent the head cheerleader to help make him popular. What could possibly go wrong? This movie is a personal favorite of mine. It kind of enjoys cult status, and I hope you'll give it a chance despite its shallow premise.

The movie begins with the nerdy Ronald Miller (Patrick Dempsey) pining over head cheerleader Cindy Mancini (Amanda Peterson). Ronald is tired of being a social leper and tells his best friend Kenneth (Courtney Gains) that, in order to enjoy his senior year, he wants to be popular. Kenneth scoffs at him and explains that the nerds are the nerds, and the jocks are the jocks, and that's just how it is.

Cindy is the queen bee in the senior class. In an attempt to maintain her cool-girl status, Cindy wears her mother's white, suede, fringed outfit to a back to school party without permission (seems like a logical choice for a drunken pool party). When one of the jocks spills red wine on her, she's left to either buy a new outfit, which would cost \$1,000, or fess up to her



mom and get in trouble.

Enter Ronald Miller. Ronald spent all summer saving his money from cutting lawns to buy a new telescope. However, when he sees Cindy arguing with the guy at the suede store, he rushes over to her and offers her a deal. He'll give her the money if she pretends to date him for one month to make him popular. Cindy thinks he's crazy, but she doesn't have much of a choice, so she agrees to his scheme and they both swear to keep it a secret.



RONNIE MILLER FLASHING BILLS.

Well, Ronald was right. After getting past the initial confusion in the popular clique, he starts to gain traction and eventually his stock starts to rise. He goes to parties, hangs out with the jocks, and ditches Kenneth (much to Kenneth's dismay). When the agreed-upon month comes to a close, Ronald stages a break-up with Cindy and revels in his newfound popularity.

Cindy, however, really started to like Ronald. You see, Cindy isn't just a dumb, popular, cheerleader. She writes poetry, she struggles with her



RONNIE GETS GIRLS AND JOCKS TO LIKE HIM.

popularity, and she's nice to everyone. Ronald seemed to appreciate these qualities. After the fake break-up, she tells him to be true to himself and not let popularity go to his head. But, as I'm sure you can guess, Ronald lets popularity go straight to his head.

As time goes by, Ronald's popularity grows at the same rate as Cindy's disdain for him. He dates all of Cindy's friends, he lets his grades slip, and he acts like an absolute asshole. Everything comes to a head at a New Year's Eve party when Cindy sees Ronald in the bathroom with some random girl and hears him quote one of her poems. Cindy loses it. She tells the whole party about their secret, and Ronald's high school rule comes to an end.



IT'S A NERD HERD!

*Can't Buy Me Love* was one of those movies I used to watch over and over again with my friends. We loved it because it was so quotable. Ronald's younger brother, Chuckie (a 13-year-old Seth Green), had so many fun lines and we repeated them ad nauseam. Seeing the movie as an adult reminds me of those good times, so I was disappointed to learn that critics hated it. [1] I mean, I know it's not a great film, but it's not that bad.

Caryn James of the *New York Times* did bring up a good point though. [2] Throughout the whole movie, Ronald never explains why he wants to be popular. He tells his friends he wants to do something different, but he never explains why he seeks popularity. He seems to be pining for Cindy at the start of the movie, but once she starts to show interest in him, he ignores her. So what's his end game? We never

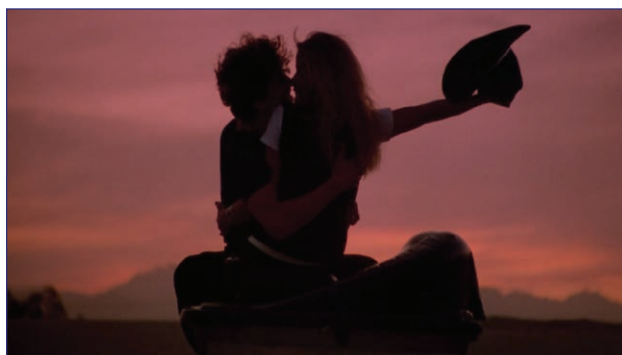
really find out.

On the flip side, Cindy seems to really struggle with her popular status, and she gets mad at her friends for fawning all over Ronald once he becomes popular. Once their scam is revealed and her friends make fun of him again, she points out that when he was popular they were all over him. Why doesn't Cindy move on from her shallow friends? And why aren't her friends equally mad at her for taking part in Ronald's scheme? Furthermore, after about four months of Ronald's groveling and apologies, Cindy comes around and gets together with him. In the end, he still gets the girl. So, I guess money can eventually buy love and that there is no real moral lesson in this movie. But it's still fun to watch.



In 2012, Director Steve Rash gave an interview to Moviehole to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the film's opening. [3] He explained that early versions of the script were rated R, and it was much more of a sexploitation flick. After talking with producers about removing all of the R-rated scenes, Rash and screenwriter Michael Swerdlick rewrote the script and the finished product is what we have today.

According to 80's Movies Rewind, *Can't Buy Me Love* was shot as an indie film on a budget of \$1.7 million. [4] Disney eventually acquired the movie, and it was one of the first outside acquisitions in the history of the Walt Disney Company. Originally titled *Boy Rents Girls*, it was Disney executive Michael Eisner who suggested calling the movie *Can't Buy Me Love* (and he had to pay Michael Jackson a pretty penny for



the use of the song). It went on to gross \$31 million in the United States. [5]

The two young stars of the movie were unknowns at the time. Patrick Dempsey was around 20 when they filmed it. He went on to have a lengthy career and is now known as McDreamy from *Grey's Anatomy*. Amanda Peterson was only 15 when she was cast in this movie (which surprised me because she definitely seems older). She has a handful of acting credits following *Can't Buy Me Love*, but she retired from the entertainment industry in 1994.

Peterson suffered from drug addiction and was arrested several times after she left Hollywood. She died of an accidental drug overdose in 2015. After her death, her parents did an interview on *The Doctors* in which they revealed that, right around the time she was cast in this movie, she was assaulted by a man more than twice her age. [6] Peterson didn't tell her parents about it for more than two years after the incident, and when her parents wanted to go to the police, she refused to press charges. All in all, it's a very sad story.

On a lighter note, *Can't Buy Me Love* provided the inspiration for the title of the now-defunct, DC-based podcast *Chips, Dips and Dorks*, which is about 80's movies. [7] You can still listen to their episodes (all 218 of them including one on *Can't Buy Me Love*) on their website. Before you listen, make sure you watch the movie. Ignore the critics. *Can't Buy Me Love* is a fun time.





## ESSAY BY JANENE SCELZA

### MOVIE DETAILS

Release Date:  
June 3, 1988

Written by: Gary Ross  
and Anne Spielberg

Directed by: Penny  
Marshall

### WATCH IT NOW

Rent or buy online.

## FOREVER YOUNG: BIG

The 1988 comedy *Big* was a standout in a decade crammed with body-switch and role-reversal comedies. *Big* was a little of both. A boy makes a wish and transforms overnight into a grown man. He befriends another adult who learns to be a kid again.

An endlessly funny and endearing film, *Big* is also a satisfying rebuttal to Ally Sheedy's cynical conclusion in *The Breakfast Club* that, "when you grow up, your heart dies." *Big* shows us that even the best-intentioned can't avoid the complications of adulthood. And, those whose hearts have seemingly grown cold sometimes just need a little reminder of that child within (but, not in that saccharine, Hallmark Channel kind of way).

That reminder is there from the start of the film, opening with ordinary scenes of 13-year-old Josh Baskin's (David Moscow) life. The nostalgia sucks you right in (especially the part where they wrote kids that felt like genuine kids). He plays computer games. He hangs out with his best friend, Billy (Jared Rushton). They talk about girls. And of course, all of the kids try to appear more mature than they are.

That last part is really what leads to Josh's big transformation. He bumps



into his crush while queuing for a roller coaster at a carnival. *Awesome!* She asks if he's alone and he says yes, but then she sees his parents in dorky souvenir hats. *Oh man...* Her boyfriend, Derek, who drives, joins them in the line. *What the F?!* And then, as Josh is getting on the rollercoaster, the ticket attendant tells him – out loud – that he's too short and maybe he should try the kiddie ride. *Oof! T.K.O. ... Sorry, kid!*

As he's moping around, Josh stumbles upon one of those kitschy fortune teller machines and tells a robotic genie, Zoltar, that he wishes to be "big." (Pro-tip; never be vague with wishes that might come true). In the morning, he stumbles out of bed a full-grown man, played by Tom Hanks.

Fun fact: Zoltar machines are real.

[1] And so are wishes.

That could have easily been the set-up for yet another ridiculous body-transformation movie but, unlike most other kid-to-adult transition comedies, this one is so remarkably grounded. It doesn't play up the science fiction element; there's no need to explain Zoltar's existence, and the transformation is subtle (Josh sleeps through a storm). Josh doesn't turn into an adult and immediately go crazy doing all the things previously off limits to him (think Kevin MacCallister relishing his freedom in *Home Alone*).

Despite appearances, you never forget that he's just a 13 year-old boy. He cries himself to sleep his first night alone. He binges on junk food and nonsense. He's sheepish about romance. (Part of that owes to director Penny Marshall's technique. For every scene in which adult Josh appears, she had David Moscow first act out the scene, and Tom Hanks would imitate him, adding his own little touches, of course. [2])

Josh tries to immediately undo the wish, but the carnival is long gone. He understandably fails to convince his mother (Mercedes Ruehl) that he's her little boy, even pulling down his pants to reveal cartoon-patterned underwear and a birthmark. So, his last best hope is his madly loyal, wiser best friend, Billy (because if anyone is going to believe Josh, of course it would be a kid).



THE BIG PROBLEM.

Josh's return to normal is delayed by bureaucracy, of all things. The boys file a request with the city for a list of vendors that might have a Zoltar machine after failing to find it on their own, and are told it takes several weeks to process and send. File under: 80's problems that could've been quickly solved by the Internet.

Unable to return home looking the way he does, Josh gets a room at seedy hotel and lucks into a job doing data entry for a toy company. The elderly boss (Robert Loggia), who seems frustrated with how to market toys to the 13+ crowd (hint: wait two decades), is impressed by Josh's insights when they bump into each other at FAO Schwarz. They bond over a round of "Heart & Soul" on a giant floor piano and then the boss promotes him to the marketing team. He gets a huge office and the privilege of playing with toys all day.



THE BIG PROMOTION.

This, along with his childish obliviousness, angers his coworker, Paul (John Heard), who seems to have an eternal stick up his butt. He's played up as a childish bully, even trying to prove his might by challenging Josh to a round



THE BIG SURPRISE.

of squash and then starting a fight with him when it doesn't go his way. Josh's other co-worker, Susan (Elizabeth Perkins), who has long been around unremarkable men – including Paul – finds both Josh mysterious and alluring.

Initially, Susan is like the office Iron Lady – one more joyless soul in a toy company trying to measure fun in a marketing report. But as she spends more time around Josh, she softens considerably. In one scene, they leave a stuffy company party together and go to his apartment. Susan is expecting that she and Josh will sleep together, but is surprised when he opens the door to find a giant trampoline, pinball machine, bunk beds, and a lot of other things to get the young viewers drooling. (This is one of those moments when the man-child is acceptable).

By night's end, Susan is on the bottom of a bunk bed being handed a glow-in-the-dark decoder ring so she will "never lose her way again."

That loft is one of the things I loved about this movie as a kid. Josh didn't just get to be-



THE BIG SCORE.

come an adult and do whatever he wanted. He got to become the best kind of adult, with the cool job, the coolest apartment, and an awesome friend by his side for much of it. This is what I thought "adulting" was all about. As an adult, his fortuitous rise is ridiculous and cliché, but no less amusing.

By the second half of the film, Josh and Susan grow closer together, professionally and romantically. It gets serious and complicated. Josh and Susan have sex off-camera before she learns anything about his real identity. As Josh spends more time with Susan and less time with Billy, his best friend worries that Josh will forget about his roots. As it turns out, even Josh needed that reminder, too. I especially love Jared Rushton in the scene where he urges Josh to check himself before he wrecks himself, essentially.

*Big* is such a well-done film. Naturally, it was a massive box office hit, earning Oscar nods for Tom Hanks for Best Actor and Anne Spielberg (sister of Steven) and her neighbor, Gary Ross, for Best Original Screenplay. [3] Penny Marshall also became the first female to direct a feature film to earn more than \$1 million. She scored two more big hits in the early 90s with *Awakenings* and *A League of their Own* (which Tom Hanks also starred in). [4]

Tom Hanks was the first choice for the project but was already committed to do *Dragnet* and *Punchline*. A lot of big names were tossed around, including Harrison Ford (who short-listed Steven Spielberg for directors). Penny Marshall lobbied for Robert DeNiro when Hanks turned them down, but in my mind he would've been too old for the part. He was out of the running anyway when they low-balled him on pay. By then, Hanks wrapped on the other movies and was able to take the part. [5]

*Big* was adapted for a brief run on Broadway in 1996 (because if they're not remaking movies, they're turning them into plays). Fox also announced plans for a sitcom in 2014 loosely based on the movie, though nothing came of it. [6] Perhaps the best revival was Hanks parodying the Zoltar scene on Stephen Colbert's show a few years back. [7]



## ESSAY BY STEPHANIE MCDEVITT

### MOVIE DETAILS

Release Date:  
October 24, 1986

Written by: Carol  
Miner

Directed by: Steve  
Miner

### WATCH IT NOW

Stream it on Amazon  
Prime and Hoopla.

## THE COSBY DECADE: SOUL MAN

*Soul Man* stars C. Thomas Howell in blackface. I just want to put this as plainly as possible. The lead male actor in this movie wore blackface and played a role in which he pretended to be black to get a scholarship to Harvard Law School. Oof. File this under “Racist movies that would never be made today.”

Mark Watson (C. Thomas Howell) is a white, spoiled, rich kid from southern California. He is about to graduate from UCLA and just got his acceptance letter to Harvard Law school. However, when he tells his parents he got into Harvard, they tell him it’s time for him to man up and pay his own way. They can’t be serious?

Well, it turns out Mark’s parents are serious so he tries to get a loan, but his credit is bad because he doesn’t pay his bills on time. He tries to get a scholarship, but he doesn’t qualify for any of them. He even calls the financial aid office, but that doesn’t work either because his parents are rich. Never once does he consider getting a job. Not even for a second does this cross his mind.

Instead, Mark contacts his friend who is working on a formula for a tan-





MARK IS ACTUALLY A WHITE GUY.

ning pill. He takes more than the recommended dose, gets a Jheri curl, and disguises himself as a black man in order to qualify for a scholarship that is awarded to a black applicant from the LA area. He lands the scholarship, and when he tells his best friend, Gordon (Arye Gross), about his plan, Gordon tells him he's crazy. Mark tells Gordon to relax because "This is the Cosby decade. America loves black people."

What follows is a series of scenes in which the writers set up racial stereotypes and tired tropes to show that Mark is experiencing the world as a black man would. Two white guys argue over picking him for their basketball teams and when he's not a good basketball player they get mad. Whitney (Melora Hardin), his white neighbor, sleeps with him and uses him to get back at her dad (Leslie Nielsen), who doesn't like black people. And, there is a running gag where he hears the same two guys making racist jokes over and over and then saying, "no offense."



OBLIGATORY BASKETBALL SCENE.

In the midst of all this, Mark is struggling in his criminal law class with Professor Banks (James Earl Jones) who tells Mark that at no point will he cut him any slack. And finally, he has fallen for Sarah (Rae Dawn Chong), another black student. Eventually, she starts to fall for him too and it comes out that she would have gotten his scholarship if he hadn't applied for it. Suddenly, Mark realizes that he was wrong to pretend to be black. It takes an awful lot for him to realize this.



JAMES EARL JONES CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S IN THIS MOVIE.

Mark decides he wants to come clean, but before that can happen, everything comes crashing down. His parents show up unannounced to tell him they're willing to pay for school (they do not know about his scheme), Whitney is half-naked in his bedroom waiting for him, and Sarah comes over to study. At this point, the ruse is up.

*Soul Man* opened to protests by both the NAACP and UCLA's Black Student Alliance. Benjamin Hooks, the president of the NAACP at the time, called the movie "A cheaply made, cynical viewpoint of black involvement in American life." [1] The black American Law Students Association at UCLA said, "The movie *Soul Man* is another attempt to characterize blacks in the 1980's. However, it is a shallow and futile portrayal of black law students at Harvard Law School. We find the Al Jolson-like portrayal of the main character offensive and trivializing of the reality of black law students everywhere."



LESLIE NIELSON CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S IN THIS MOVIE.

Everyone involved with the movie defended it. Rae Dawn Chong gave an interview in 1986 in which she said, "There are some horrible black jokes in 'Soul Man' but they aren't designed to offend anyone. When a film takes the risk of showing the realistic side of bigots, then people get up in arms. They acknowledge racism exists, but they don't want it to be seen. We took a brave stance. Instead of just talking about racism, we showed it." [2]

In a 2016 interview, she accused Spike Lee of making it controversial. "It was only controversial because Spike Lee made a thing of it. He'd never seen the movie and he just jumped all over it." [3] I couldn't find specific quotes attributed to Spike Lee. The only story about Spike Lee I could find was a retelling of a conversation he had with Obama about seeing *Do the Right Thing* on Obama's first date with Michelle. Apparently Lee said he was glad the Obamas saw his movie and not *Soul Man*. [4]

Producer Steve Tisch said, "We're prepared to let the audience--both black and white-- make their own decisions on the politics of 'Soul Man.' We never designed the film to be the definitive statement on racial dynamics in the 1980's; our intention was to offer the audience a comedy." [5] In 2015, C Thomas Howell said "A white man donning blackface is taboo. Conversation over — you can't win. But our intentions were pure: We wanted to make a funny movie that had a message about racism." [6]

Howell boils it down one of the biggest issues

with this movie: its intentions. Yes, maybe the filmmakers intended to make a comedy that included a moral about racism. But the issue is that Carol Black, the screenwriter, and Steve Miner, the director, are both white. So, what they produced is a look at how black people experience racism as seen through the eyes of a white person.

What results is an inauthentic, shallow, basic understanding of racism that came across as farcical. In an opinion piece for the *Omaha World Herald*, Micah Mertes asks, "Is the movie taking aim at offensive racial caricatures, or is it trying to score laughs through offensive racial caricatures?" I would have to argue for choice #2. [7]



ALWAYS SMART TO INCLUDE NOOSE IMAGERY IN A BLACK FACE MOVIE.

The obvious racism aside, this is not a good movie. It's not funny (despite Howell's attempts to convince people otherwise [8]). And, in the end, Mark faces no consequences. He commits fraud and steals a good deal of money. He doesn't get expelled and he doesn't go to jail. He is forced to pay Sarah the entire amount of his scholarship plus interest, and he has to take a job in the school cafeteria. However, Sarah forgives him. Not only that, she decides to give him another chance. What?

Despite the negative press, protests, and racist premise, *Soul Man* did well at the box office, making six times its original budget. You can find it readily available on streaming services. It's still out there for everyone to see.





## ESSAY BY JANENE SCELZA

### MOVIE DETAILS

Release Date:  
March 3, 1989

Written by: Daniel Jay  
Franklin, Marc Rocco,  
and D.E. Eisenberg.

Directed by: Marc  
Rocco

### WATCH IT NOW

Stream it on Amazon  
Prime.

## THANKS, I HATE IT: DREAM A LITTLE DREAM

I'm pretty sure that the only reason anyone still talks about *Dream a Little Dream* (if they talk about it at all) is because it starred 80's teen heartthrob duo, Corey Haim and Corey Feldman (aka, The Coreys). Body-switch movies had been done to death by the end of the 1980's. Even the old man/teenager body-switch -- which is what this movie is -- had been done the previous year in *18 Again!*. Luckily, *Dream a Little Dream* distinguishes itself by being both needlessly confusing and overly artsy-fartsy in its portrayal of an old man who accidentally becomes one of the asshole neighborhood teens.

Coleman Ettinger (Jason Robards) is a retired professor obsessed with the idea of mental transference and the possibility of living forever. It's not the stuff of mad scientists toiling in labs. He is basically a pleasant guy who occasionally spouts philosophical quotes and does some light Tai Chi. His wife, Gena (Piper Laurie) gently worries about him but agrees to partake in his experiment at his insistence that they could achieve some sort of absolute spiritual unity.

Coleman and Gena's story sort of parallels that of the teenagers. The movie opens with Bobby (Feldman) confessing to his best friend Dinger (Haim) that he's in love with their friend, Lainie Diamond (Meredith Salinger). Un-



fortunately, Lainie is dating their friend, Joel (William MacNamara). Dinger warns Bobby not to do anything that might ruffle Joel's fringes (which he wears often) because he can get really nuts.

For some reason, Bobby, who knows Joel as well as Dinger does, ignores this advice and pursues Lainie. Riding their bikes together one night, they cut through Coleman's yard just as he and Gena are engaged in their transference experiment. It knocks the kids off of their bikes, and then the math gets really fuzzy.

Coleman becomes Bobby. The old man himself disappears. Gena also disappears. Lainie is still Lainie, but she starts having dreams where Gena is packing up the couple's house. Coleman (as Bobby) has to find Gena and Dream Gena is searching for Coleman. So, let's call the whole thing off!



BOOMER VS. MILLENNIAL REMAKE POTENTIAL.

One thing that makes even a tiresome body-switch story entertaining is when the transformation feels convincing. Wide-eyed Judge Reinhold and surly Fred Savage in *Vice Versa* and cheerfully oblivious Tom Hanks as a child in an adult body in *Big* are good examples. Feldman, on the other hand, makes little attempt to be anything like Robards (it's a tall order). It's mostly Feldman being Feldman... and also Michael Jackson.

The real Bobby shows up in dream sequences to complain to the real Coleman that he doesn't know how to teen-age (because every adult in this movie is an insensitive moron) and that he's wrecking his social life. (To be fair, though, Coleman is doing wonders for his academics). Told he has limited time to find Gena, Coleman seeks



BOBBY GOES FOR THE C-C-COMBO BREAKER.

guidance from Bobby, who smugly fucks with him for no real reason because this whole bizarre story ends in a total cop out anyway.

Coleman's quest to find Gena is further complicated by the most uptight bunch of teenagers who all fuss and fight with each other. The worst offenders are Joel and his rebel-without-a-cause nemesis, Dumas (Matt Adler).

The search for Gena brings Bobby and Lainie closer together because Coleman suspects that Lainie is the missing link. Naturally, this sets off psycho Joel who takes his anger out on pretty much everyone.

I'd like to think that, early in the production, there was some semblance of a good movie, and that's why respected veteran actors like Jason Robards, Piper Laurie, and Harry Dean Stanton signed on. Roger Ebert, who wrote a scathing review, said it was the one movie that defied the "Stanton-Walsh" rule of filmmaking which states that a movie with Harry Dean Stanton or M. Emmet Walsh can't be all that bad. [1] Well, it was, but to



PARENT'S JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND.

*Thanks, I Hate It: Dream a Little Dream*

the trio did the best they could with the material they were given.

I used to tolerate this movie more when I was a kid, even rescuing a VHS from a video store closeout sale once upon a time. It wasn't my favorite Corey Haim or Corey Feldman movie (that was *Lost Boys*), and it was made worse by the fact that it marked the start of Feldman's weird (and enduring) Michael Jackson phase.



PSYCHO JOEL RUINS EVERYONE'S GOOD TIME.

As I've gotten older, it's harder to ignore how tone deaf the movie is, mixing goofy body-switch comedy with serious teen melodrama. It doesn't work at all. At one point, Bobby is trying to impress Lainie by dancing like Michael Jackson around the school gym, and in another scene, psycho Joel is holding a gun to Dumas's head. What?!

That the movie had three different writers probably didn't help. Film critic Richard Harrington, of the *Washington Post*, also panned the movie and urged readers in 1989 to skip director Marc Rocco's next movie. [2] But, in Mr. Rocco's defense, it was in his next feature that he proved he could do well with the right material, scoring a sleeper hit with the 1992 drama about L.A. street kids, *Where the Day Takes You*.

I assume that someone anticipated this movie wouldn't turn out well and had the forethought to throw in lots and lots of catchy rock songs in the hope that, at the very least, they could score an MTV-worthy video to hype the movie.

I also find this particular Corey & Corey movie a real struggle to sit through now, given all the

news has come out in the interim about the pair's struggles with drug addiction and sexual abuse and how strung out both actors were by the end of the 80's. Their careers would never really recover. Haim, especially, would struggle for years to regain relevance in the business, only to surface in a string of forgettable direct-to-video titles like the *Fast Getaway* movies, *Just One of the Girls*, *The Double O Kid*, and even a sequel to *Dream a Little Dream*.



THE COREYS™

There's also a whole sordid history involving Marc Rocco's, step-father Alex, who plays Bobby's exceptionally clueless father in the movie. Alex was said to have ties to the Mafia. [3] Ugh...

Not surprisingly, the movie was a box office bomb, ranking 16th in the body-switch category (and one place higher than *18 Again!*). [4] Delighted audience reviews, presumably from new young fans of The Coreys™, pop up every now and again.

I still can't believe there is a *Dream a Little Dream 2*. Though, I suppose if a piece of shit like *Hobgoblins* could get a sequel, anything is possible. I have a suspicion it was a Corey & Corey pet project in an attempt to turn their careers around. In the very 90's, straight-to-video sequel, Bobby and Dinger have become an L.A. Odd Couple. New Age Dinger discovers a pair of sunglasses that allow you to manipulate other people. Hmm... At least the sequel is much easier to follow, but Corey Feldman gets more screen time for his Michael Jackson impressions.

Better yet, let's just call the whole thing off.

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  - [5] Garin Pirnia: "12 Fun Facts About Can't Buy Me Love" (Mental Floss) <https://tinyurl.com/>

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## CAN'T BUY ME LOVE (1987)



# ENDNOTES (CONT'D.)

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