

★ 52 Pickup

Plaza

This is a sleazy, distasteful and — most damning of all — boring movie. It is the second failed attempt to adapt an Elmore Leonard novel to the big screen, and it's becoming increasingly clear that he simply doesn't travel well.

Leonard is widely considered one of the best thriller writers around, and his entertaining stories explore the seedy world of drug dealers, pimps and murderers. But *52 Pickup* doesn't explore anything, it just exploits — and not that well.

The story focuses on Harry Mitchell (Roy Scheider), a man who cheated on his wife, Barbara (Ann-Margaret), and begins to pay a heavy price.

The girl he slept with was a set up and some thugs try to blackmail Harry with videotapes of his exploits. When he balks at their demands, they kill the girl and convince Harry that they can frame him for the deed. Normally, Harry would go to the police, but his wife is running for commissioner and, if this story leaks out, her political future will be ruined. So Harry decided to fight back.

The sign of a really bad movie is when you start to notice a lot of holes in the plot. Well, 20 minutes into *52 Pickup*, I'd figured out about 10 different ways Harry could have gotten out of this mess. It wasn't because I *cared* about Harry; I just wanted the movie to

finish so I could get out of that theater.

Perhaps with a top-notch cast, Leonard could be adapted properly. Of course, Scheider and Margaret are respectable actors, but Leonard's real strength is the odd-ball minor characters who, unfortunately, are played by such lightweight as Vanity and former *Mod Squad* Clarence Williams III.

However, we may never see a good adaption of a Leonard novel. Burt Reynolds' *Stick* (the first such attempt) was a dismal failure and *52 Pickup* is sure to follow in its ignominious footsteps. One more failure like that and Hollywood may decide to leave well-enough alone. Oh well. The cinema's loss is pulp fiction's gain.

By Michael Giltz

★★★ Tai Pan

Royal Park

It takes a while to get going and contains a few hockey lines, but ultimately *Tai Pan* is an enjoyable romp that's at its best when concentrating on the comical, complex relationship between the Tai Pan (Bryan Brown) and his "China Lady," May-May (Joan Chen).

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