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BY MICHAEL GILTZ

## Blood Simple

*Blood Simple* is an audacious, inventive and entertaining thriller.

The movie opens with Marty, a saloon owner, receiving the news from a private detective that his wife has been cheating on him with Ray the bartender. Driven almost mad with jealousy, Marty decides to have them killed.

This is merely the starting point of *Blood Simple* and to give away any more of the storyline would be a crime, for much of the enjoyment of this movie derives from the many twists and turns that it takes.

Add to this an impeccable cast and *Blood Simple* becomes an almost flawless directorial debut.

Dan Hedaya (*Tightrope*) is believably overbearing as Marty, while Frances McDormand is at once vulnerable and tough as his unfaithful wife. John Getz portrays Ray the bartender whose hapless confusion gives this murder-mystery its emotional anchor.

As good as they are, the shining performance is delivered by M. Emmet Walsh (*Reds, Blade Runner*) as the private detective turned murderer. His harsh, strident laugh and slow, slurring speech are difficult to forget, and his every movement and mannerism is uncannily accurate.

The true strengths of *Blood Simple*, however, lie in the script by Joel and Ethan Coen and in Joel's direction, which is fresh and imaginative.

The camera is constantly on the move, looking for the odd angle or telling detail. In the bar scenes, it slides around empty glasses and skips over drunken patrons. When Marty grapples with Abby, the camera rushes toward them like an attacker.

None of this is arty or standoffish, but merely adds to the power of the story.

Like Hitchcock, most of the suspense is created by sleight-of-hand. Though the violence is explicit at two or three points, it is never exploitative. Showing blood dripping from the fingers of a dead man is more scary than any slow-motion stabbing could ever be.

Joel and Ethan Coen are certainly two names to watch for in coming years. Meanwhile, *Blood Simple* is something to watch right now.

## Lost in America

In many ways, *Lost in America* is like a little puppy dog: it's very cute and huggable. But, after two hours, you can't help wishing it would grow up, learn some tricks and entertain you.

Albert Brooks wrote, directed and stars in this tale of David

Howard, a barely middle-aged man who works for one of the biggest ad agencies in the country and his wife, Linda (portrayed wonderfully by Julie Hagerty of *Airplane*).

When David doesn't get the promotion he deserves and is ultimately fired, he convinces his wife to quit her job, sell everything, buy a motor home and go travelling across the country so they can find themselves. "... just like in *Easy Rider*."

At first, the young yuppies are highly optimistic and enthusiastic, but they soon crash with hard reality, including everything from a run-away murderer to the pitfalls of Las Vegas.

While the plot may seem farfetched, it is quite believable due in large part to the realistic characters that Brooks has created. When David and Linda fight, for example, it is a real fight, frequently funny, but not a series of Neil Simon-esque one-liners.

The humor in *Lost in America* consists of the type of jokes that two friends might share over lunch, which is why this movie is never more than intelligently amusing.

*Lost in America* is a friendly little comedy that wags its tail, but it is not the uproarious crowd-pleaser that will someday give Albert Brooks the mass following he so richly deserves.

## The Company of Wolves

Hammer Films, and other British studios like it, built a solid reputation during the '40s and '50s by creating stylish and respectable horror movies. In a return to that spirit (if not substance), Cannon Groups has imported *The Company of Wolves*, a thriller about werewolves that is set in the Middle Ages.

Visually, it is well done and director Neil Jordan has done a nice job of choosing interesting shots and developing a suitably spooky atmosphere. The British cast is competent while Angela Lansbury (*Murder, She Wrote*) is simply marvelous as the superstitious grandmother.

However, *The Company of Wolves* is only vaguely interesting, for its plot is meandering and pointless. For no apparent reason, it begins and ends with scenes from the present in which a young girl is sleeping restlessly.

Despite this odd, confusing and unexplained framework, the bulk of the movie is about a maiden called Rosaleen who listens to her grandmother recount old wives' tales about werewolves.

None of the stories are particularly gripping or serve any purpose, such as advancing the storyline. Later in the movie, Rosaleen is walking to her grandmother's house when she meets (surprise! surprise!) a man who is really a werewolf.

The last half hour is a muddled mess in which a potentially exciting climax is interrupted with yet another werewolf story.

So despite some nice flourishes, this quirky little movie is largely unsatisfying.

The road to bad (or, in this case, mediocre) films is paved with good intentions, and the latest addition is *The Company of Wolves*.



Frances McDormand plays an unfaithful wife in *Blood Simple*.

## Moving Violations

The creators of *Police Academy* have cranked out a new comedy called *Moving Violations*. At an hour and forty minutes and roughly two hundred jokes long, you would hope for something funny in the film. Nothing is.

The plot, such as it is, tells the story of an assorted bunch of weird but lovable people who get sent to traffic school. Their instructor is a hateful, almost fascist policeman and, if they don't pass the test, their cars will be sold and their licenses permanently revoked.

Of course, the instructor doesn't want them to pass; he and the traffic court judge skim off money from the sale of impounded cars.

The storyline also includes some cheap sex (though no nudity) and even cheaper jokes. For example, an old woman who has trouble seeing, accidentally enters a men's room and is later found sitting on a urinal. Funny? No.

Still, the most annoying aspect of *Moving Violations* is the lead character, Dana Cannon. He is played by John Murray, Bill Murray's brother. John looks like his brother, talks like him and many of his lines sound as if they were lifted from old Bill Murray movies. Unfortunately, John isn't as funny.

Hopefully, *Moving Violations* will not fare too well at the box office. If it does, that might encourage the producers to make a sequel, and the last thing this troubled world needs is *Moving Violations II: Their First Assignment*.