

# HOLIDAY MOVIE GUIDE



The Historian Skeksis in *The Dark Crystal*.

BY JUDITH SIMS

This is Hollywood's favorite time of year: happy people sharing love, presents, good will—and going to the movies. Traditionally, late December is Big Bucks time for the studios, when all those bored, restless, humbug folks (college students included) go to dark theaters in search of laughs, insights and stale popcorn. Thus giving the film studios their own presents (money!) and good cheer (success!). Everybody should be happy during the holidays. . . .

Last year, it should be noted, we had an abundance of turkeys for the season, and I do not refer to the light-and-dark-meat variety. In December 1981 Buddy Buddy, Rollover, Heartbeeps, Pennies from Heaven, Modern Problems and Whose Life Is It Anyway? all did Scroogy business. Bombed, as it were.

This year, Hollywood is offering eighteen hopefuls of assorted types and sizes. Maybe our luck (and the studios') will change.

**SOPHIE'S CHOICE** stars Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline and Peter MacNichol in the film version of William Styron's best-selling novel about a Catholic Polish immigrant who survived a Nazi concentration camp. The story plays out in Brooklyn, where Sophie and her Jewish lover Nathan (Kline) live in a boarding house also shared by young Stingo (MacNichol), a would-be writer who falls in love with Sophie. The Holocaust is presented in flashback, filmed in Poland (Streep learned Polish for the role). Written and directed by Alan Pakula.

**SIX WEEKS** gives us Dudley Moore and Mary Tyler Moore (no relation, naturally. . .) and young bal-

airina Katherine Healy in a modern three-hanky romance. Dudley's a politician, Mary's a cosmetics queenpin, Healy is her doomed dancing daughter. Actor Tony Bill directed. For those expecting this year's version of *Arthur*, be advised that this is being called Dudley Moore's first dramatic role.

**FRANCES** is the compelling, often gruesome story of Thirties actress Frances Farmer, who rebelled against conformity and ended up in a mental institution. Jessica Lange stars, acclaimed stage actress Kim Stanley portrays her dominating mother, and playwright Sam Shepard is a mysterious detective who met Frances when she was 16 and loved her until her death in 1970.

**THE DARK CRYSTAL** is a live-action, non-animated film in which no humans appear—only creatures devised by Muppeteers Jim Henson and Frank Oz and artist (the book *Faeries*) Brian Froud. *The Dark Crystal* is peopled (created?) with Gellings, Skeksis, Garthim warriors and Mystics; they all talk and move (thanks to some space age engineering by the technicians behind the creatures) amid magical forests and anthropomorphic rivers. The plot is good vs. evil, the effects look spectacular, and it's all produced by Star Wars' producer Gary Kurtz.

**THE VERDICT** stars Paul Newman as a down-and-out Boston lawyer, a drunk who's sunk so low he frequents funeral parlors hoping to cadge a few contested-will cases. He is suddenly handed the case of a lifetime: an "unwinnable" malpractice suit against a big, rich Catholic hospital. But first, he has to get sober. . . . Charlotte Rampling and Lindsay Crouse also star.

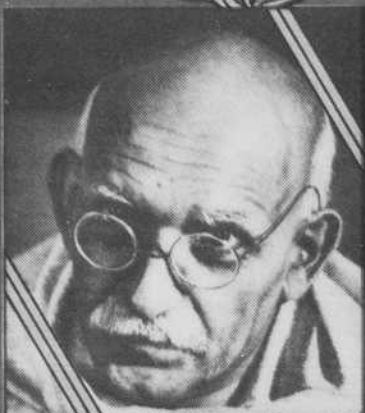
**KISS ME GOODBYE** stars James Caan, Sally Field and Jeff Bridges in a good-natured fantasy love story wherein Caan, deceased famous Broadway choreographer, returns to haunt his very much alive wife (Field) on the eve of her wedding to Egyptologist Bridges. There is a message underlying the silliness—letting go of the past—and Caan does some tap dancing; the latter may (or may not) be worth the price of admission.

**AIRPLANE II: THE SEQUEL** reportedly has wonderfully dumb puns just like the original; it also stars Robert Hays and Julie Hagerty, just like the original (plus dozens of famous TV faces like Peter Graves, Sonny Bono, Raymond Burr, William Shatner, et al.) This time, the

airplane is really the space shuttle, and it's forced to crash land on the moon. . . . where it is greeted by several Hare Krishnas.

**TOOTSIE**: Dustin Hoffman in drag. As an out-of-work actor desperate for work, any work, Hoffman dons a dress, makeup and wig and lands a part in a soap opera. As a woman, Tootsie also stars Jessica Lange, Charles Durning and Teri Garr.

**THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON** (a huge Broadway hit in 1972) was written by Jason Miller, who also directed this film version (as an actor, he starred in *The Exorcist*, but nobody's perfect). The title season was 1957, when the players (our stars) won the Pennsylvania basketball championship; they've been getting together every year, more or less, with their coach (Robert M'Chum), but this time, the 25th anniversary things are a little different. Stars Martin Sheen, Bruce Dern, Stacy Keach and Paul Sorvino.



Ben Kingsley as Gandhi.

**FIVE DAYS ONE SUMMER**. Set in 1932, *Five Days* is a provocative, haunting tale of sexual obsession, hopeless love and shattered dreams, but told with restrained passion. Sean Connery is a Scottish doctor who's come to the Alps for some mountain climbing and adultery—with his young niece (Betsy Brantley); their Swiss guide (Lambert Wilson) completes a very tense triangle. This is not a film that bangs us over the head; it lingers and resonates and captivates. Fred Zinneman directed with impeccable skill; he has reportedly wanted to make this film ever since he read the Kay Boyle short story "Maiden Maiden" on which it is "partially" based. He read it 40 years ago. . . . as I said, it lingers.

**HONKY TONK**. One of the worst things about last year's holiday fare was the total absence of the tradi-

tional Clint Eastwood offering. Well, thank goodness, the man has come through for us this year. *Honky Tonk* is a more "personal" film, we're told (not exactly *Dirty Harry* Goes to a Bar, if you get my drift, podner). Clint plays a singer—yes, a singer—back in the Thirties, who journeys from dust bowl Oklahoma to the Grand Ole Opry to make his name and fortune. Clint also produced and directed and I, for one, can't wait.

**BEST FRIENDS**. Burt Reynolds, who used to be ingratiating and amusing but is now just boring and self-important; and Goldie Hawn, who was once cutely iconoclastic but is now just cute, portray two screenwriters whose close working habits lead to closer personal habits. *Best Friends* was written by Barry Levinson (who wrote *Diner*) and Valerie Curtin; together they also wrote. . . . and *Justice for All*, among others, and *Best Friends* is partially based on their own writing (and other) experiences.

**TWICE UPON A TIME** is that old-fashioned holiday standby, an animated adventure film in which two apprentice heroes do battle with evil. The subtitle may explain everything: "The Synonymess Botch and His Murk Workers Try to Save the Rushes of Din from Non-Stop Nightmare Bombs—Clocks Stand Still."

**GANDHI** is a four-hour multi-million dollar international cast-of-thousands epic—and glorious it is, too. (*Gandhi*, *Five Days One Summer* and *Still of the Night* are the only films in this list I've actually viewed.) We see Gandhi's rise from lawyer to spiritual leader, his power and influence over millions simply awesome: when Gandhi fasted, India came to a halt until he resumed eating. Ben Kingsley, a British/Indian actor and member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, is completely convincing. The script is powerful and witty, the spectacles spectacular, the path to unity and peace fascinating. In these uncertain times, it is strangely comforting to look back at other uncertain times, to see one little man stubbornly—but peacefully—prevail over one of the most powerful nations in the world. Gandhi instructed the world in the ways and powers of non-violent protest; it is a lesson worth a refresher course.

**48 HRS.** has Nick Nolte as a tough Los Angeles cop who springs Eddie Murphy (the comedian from *Saturday Night Live* in his first film role) from the slammer because he needs

Murphy's help in tracking down some vicious cop killers. Written and directed by Walter Hill (*The Warriors*, *Southern Comfort*, *The Driver*) who knows a thing or two about stylish violence.



Jeff Bridges, Sally Field and James Caan in *Kiss Me Goodbye*.

**THE TOY** stars Jackie Gleason and Richard Pryor, which is a good start. It's based on the French film of the same name which starred Francois Perrin (that blond guy in *The Tall Blond Man with One Black Shoe*). It was awful, even in French. The plot (assuming they haven't changed it drastically): Jackie Gleason is richer than any man has a right to be; one Christmas, his son wanders through a store and decides he wants Richard Pryor, out-of-work journalist, as his new toy. Gleason obligingly "buys" Pryor for his son, and thereafter son and father learn a few corny lessons about life and love from their new possession. Let's hope it improves in English.

**STILL OF THE NIGHT**. Meryl Streep is a mysterious and very nervous woman whose lover was just murdered; Roy Scheider was her lover's psychiatrist. Written and directed by Robert Benton (*Kramer vs. Kramer*), this movie wants very much to be a stylish Hitchcockian thriller. . . . but it's too obvious, too self-consciously scary, and ultimately just plain silly. (An aside: the actors smoke enough cigarettes in this flick to choke the audience. Any audience.)

**THE TRAIL OF THE PINK PANTHER**. For people who can't get enough of Peter Sellers as the bumbling Inspector Clouseau, director Blake Edwards put together this pastiche of film clips from previous Pink Panther films. Outtakes, in other words. The bits are tied together by a journalist reviewing the Inspector's cluttered life.