

# VIDEO

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undisciplined and cinematically unimpressive black comedy, except this: If I ever see Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner fight or make love on screen again, I'll puke.

Perhaps it has to do with director/co-star Danny DeVito. He's such a nice guy, he'd be buddies with anyone. The trouble is, if you get too many buddies, it can get in the way of the project.

Besides best pals Douglas and Turner, DeVito's movie was backed by long-time buddy and colleague Jim Brooks, creator of DeVito's sitcom, *Taxi*, and a less and less positive influence on the cinema world. DeVito and Brooks would've done well to have a little heart-to-heart talk with another buddy, namely screenwriter Michael Leeson.

TV's been very kind to Leeson — he won Emmys for writing or producing *The Cosby Show*, *Taxi*, and many more. His cronies should break it to him gently, something like this:

"Listen, Michael — we're all proud of what you've accomplished in the past, and now that you're cutting your teeth on feature film writing, we believe you could genuinely have something here when you're done. But frankly, we think your story has too many climaxes — even a black comedy has to have room to breathe.

"You could ax three or four situations: say, the bit about the dead cat or the dead dog, or the bad back or the attic scene; any one of these bits is expendable. Remember, when it comes to dense, hit-'em-over-the-head humor, none of us is Terry Gilliam."

One final note: can someone tell me which scene has a cameo appearance by yet another buddy, Jeffrey Alan Thomas? He's listed in the final credits and has played bits in all of DeVito's features; he previously played alongside DeVito as assistant dispatcher Jeff on *Taxi*.

Always ★★1/2

The battle rages on. Is Steven Spielberg an artistic filmmaker or a populist one? Personally, I'm a little too weary to wrestle with this question right now, but I will say one thing. In this picture, Spielberg accomplishes something totally different: a film that represents as little ar-

tistic growth as anything he's directed.

Or does it? This gimme plot about a devil-may-care fighter pilot who returns from the dead to haunt his widow after she remarries is part fantasy, part innocuous baby-boomer comedy and part Spielberg wondering which turn he'll take from here.

The fantasy part is safe terrain. Comedy is more dubious; there's the failure of *1941* to analyze, apart from budgetary excesses. Spielberg repeatedly attempts to inject elements of it in other films — especially in the last two Indiana Jones movies — and the results have been heavy-handed.

At best, the film is no more earth-shaking than your typical *Amazing Stories* episode, which isn't so bad, considering everything else that haunts network TV. Indeed, this may well be the first film that Spielberg has geared completely with an eye to the home video market.

Lead players Richard Dreyfuss and Holly Hunter are



Photo by Vince Ramirez

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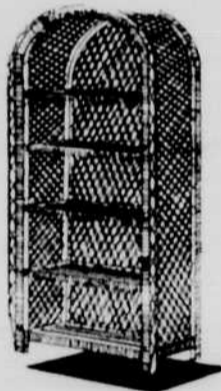
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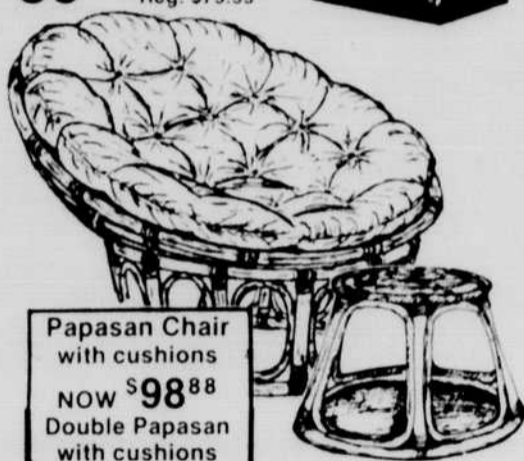
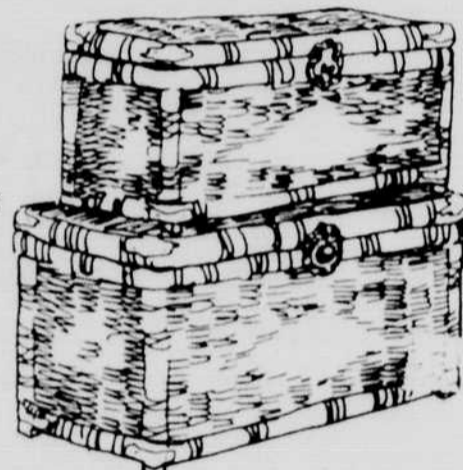
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