

Expert explains Child Online Protection Act

Internet pornography restrictions have faced tests of constitutionality

RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

The Supreme Court recently handed down a decision concerning the Child Online Protection Act. The court ruled that the act is too restrictive and handed the case back down to the U.S. District Court. Professional attorney and Internet

pornography legislation expert Frederick S. Lane III has authored a number of books, including "The Naked Employee: How Technology is Compromising Workplace Privacy." He recently agreed to talk to the Emerald about the decision and its implications.

Emerald: Can you tell me a little of the history around the Child Online Protection Act?

Frederick Lane: COPA was passed by Congress after the Communication Decency Act was invalidated by the Supreme Court. The act was signed

into law by President Clinton and was immediately challenged as unconstitutional. The basic premise of the act is to make it illegal to distribute material on the Internet that is "harmful" to minors. The reason it was challenged is that it would pose a lower standard of obscenity on every Web site. A lot of people were concerned that material that is legal for adults to read will be blocked or would have to go behind a credit card screen in order to be protected. Book sellers that sold medical information and sites that distribute sex education material for teens sued

to challenge the law.

Emerald: How would that law have affected Web sites that distributed adult material?

FL: Web sites would have to have been careful about what material could be seen before people put in a credit card number or some form of age verification. Another thing is that any site that wanted to do more than the average Playboy shot would have to use some form of credit card or age verification system, which in some cases can be very expensive. So the concern was not so much about the

commercial pornography sites so much as the sites which distribute medical information and other types of material for free right now. They were concerned that by putting credit card or age verification systems in that they would keep some people from having access to their information.

Emerald: So what does the Supreme Court's decision mean, in that it did not actually find the act unconstitutional?

FL: What the Supreme Court basically was looking at was whether or not

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'The Clearing' proves to be a thriller that fails to thrill

The film lacks substance and deviates little from genre formalities

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It's interesting that the cinematic genre that takes its name from its ability to surprise the audience is the same genre that has become the most dependent upon formulaic plots. Thrillers, which got off to such a good start with the films of Alfred Hitchcock and saw a golden age during the 1970s, have now slipped into James Patterson formalism. The number of adaptations in the past few years of that author's books should come as no surprise given the current Hollywood mindset.

The latest offering in this rote cycle of predictable thrillers (an oxymoron is ever there was one) is "The Clearing," starring Helen Mirren, Robert Redford and Willem Dafoe. But while the film offers few surprises, it is an effective exercise and can offer a couple points of interest for fans of the thriller genre.

The plot is just a bit off the standard kidnapping routine, but not enough break free of the clichés. Dafoe (who always looks like he's up to something) kidnaps wealthy businessman

Redford, showing a remarkable amount of skill given his limited experience in criminal activities. The film then begins to focus on Redford's wife, played by Mirren, as she deals with the aftermath of the kidnapping. Scenes of her talking to the FBI and dealing with her children in the weeks following her husband's disappearance are juxtaposed with flashbacks to the day of the kidnapping when Dafoe has Redford trudging through the woods.

This time-jumping works pretty smoothly and offers some interesting insights into the characters. As Mirren finds out things about her husband she did not know, we see Redford discussing his life and how he really feels about it. When Mirren tells an FBI agent about her husband, we see the traits she discussed played out in Redford's actions. The syncopation between how the characters are described and how they actually act says a lot for the acting ability in this film.

The problem is that for all the somber gravity placed into the film, it's empty of any real substance. For example, the adult children of Mirren and Redford's characters are hardly real people; like all the minor characters in the film they are nothing more than background static to

the central performances.

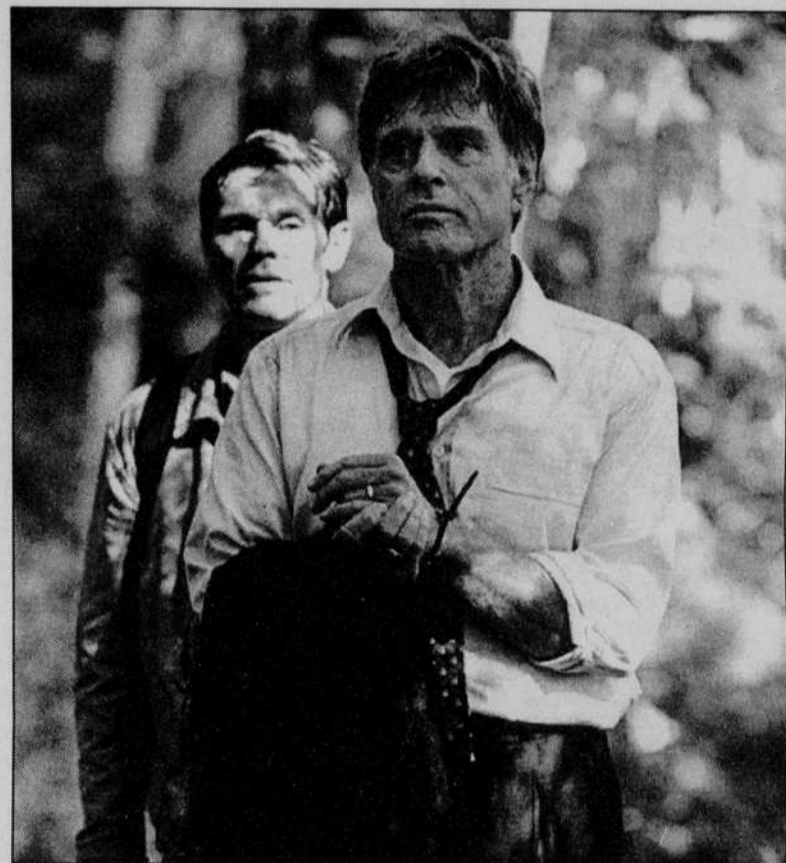
As the private lives of the characters are examined, great attention is given to problems that really don't seem that important. When Mirren learns that her husband was still seeing a woman he had had an affair with years ago, it is played as a major event when in fact it ends up having nothing to do with anything later in the film.

One problem is that for all the inner turmoil, there is very little psychological depth given to the characters. We are never given a satisfactory reason why Dafoe would commit these crimes, why Redford had an affair, as well as any number of other actions committed by these people.

In the end it all feels hollow despite the emotional and narrative twists. While the film is shot, edited, acted and written with skill and intelligence, it simply doesn't work. A poor idea that is well-executed is still just a poor idea, only now with a layer of polish.

"The Clearing" is left as just a lost opportunity. It could have broken from the modern thriller mold, but for whatever reason the filmmakers decided to play it safe.

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Courtesy

Willem Dafoe and Robert Redford star in the upcoming thriller, "The Clearing," in which Redford plays a wealthy businessman kidnapped by Dafoe.

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July 13 - 17, 2004 McDonald Theatre Schedule

Thursday, 15 July 2004		3:25	Skull Wars Revisited, Keynote address by Dr. David Hurst Thomas, curator of anthropology, American Museum of Natural History
5:45PM	Doors open	4:17	Guardians of a Legacy (USA)
6:20	Introductions	4:28	The House of Julius Polybius in Pompeii (Italy)
6:30	The Mystery of Chaco Canyon (USA)	4:37	The Splendor of Rome (Italy)
7:38	Tonto (USA)		
8:17	Searching for Blue (Peru)		
9:03	Sastun: My Apprenticeship With a Maya Healer (USA/Belize)		
Friday, 16 July 2004			
5:45PM	Doors open		
6:20	Introductions		
6:30	Bilad Chinqit-The Land of Chinguetti (Italy)		
7:40	A Forgotten Place: The History of an Abandoned Farming Community (USA)		
8:45	Ephesus-Metropolis of the Ancient World (Austria)		
Saturday, 17 July 2004			
10:15AM	Doors open		
10:50	Introductions		
11:00	The Mummies of Taklamakan (France)		
12:03PM	Sagalassos, the Forgotten City (Belgium)		
1:06	Kurtal-Snake Spirit (Australia)		
1:35	lunch break		
2:35	Time Team-Garden Secrets (UK)		

Festival Events

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, July 13-15
1-4:30PM Teachers' Workshop, Downtown Athletic Club, \$49
10 a.m. Guided trips to Heritage Sites, length varies, \$15
Friday, July 16
10AM-1PM, Children's Workshop, Alton Baker Park, \$15
10AM Guided trips to Heritage Sites, length varies, \$15
1-4PM Heritage Film Symposium, Downtown Athletic Club, \$20

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