



Paula Prentiss stars as a tough, hard-headed detective who is assigned to investigate the kidnapping of a show dog in Joseph Wambaugh's "The Black Marble."



the movies

Louise Snider

Light romance fills screen in 'Black Marble'

After the tough, go-for-broke gut punches of previous films authored by ex-L.A. cop Joseph Wambaugh, "The Black Marble" (PG) is a surprising and largely successful change of pace.

The film is directed by Harold Becker who also directed "The Onion Field."

The main characters once again are police officers, but this time Wambaugh has opted for light comedy and an offbeat romance.

Both are present in the ill-matched pairing of sergeants Natalie Zimmerman (Paula Prentiss) and A.M. Valnikov (Robert Foxworth).

Zimmerman is a realistic, no-nonsense lady cop who can gun you down with words. She is outspoken, practical-minded and abrasive. To her dismay, she is partnered with Valnikov, a drunk and a real loser, the one who always gets "the black marble."

VALNIKOV is an old world romantic, a moody Slav who loves gypsy music, tea from glasses and tradition. He and Zimmerman create a contrapuntal interplay of personality and physical type. She's lean, dark and tense; he's cuddly, light and loose. Together they spark an energy-producing combo that keeps things humming.

The case they are working on is itself offbeat - a dogsnapping. The mythic forces of good and evil that powered Wambaugh's earlier work are less potent here, kept in check and in balance in situations that contain both the ordinary and the ridiculous.

Harry Dean Stanton takes honors for his characterization of the repulsive yet comical dogsnapper, Philo Skinner. Skinner is a chain-smoking dog trainer, "the terrier king," who steals a prize schnauzer to pay off a gambling debt. Poor Skinner bumbles as often as he succeeds.

Even when he uses a pay phone to make his ransom call, he has to deal with the wrath of a motel owner who teaches him a lesson for spitting on her property.

Unusual episodes like this, an original chase sequence through a kennel and individual little scenes that focus on human qualities take "The Black Marble" out of the ordinary cops and robbers genre.

ANOTHER FACTOR that contributes to the fresh look of the film is the choice of cast. From Foxworth, Prentiss and Stanton to John Hancock, a smooth-talking detective who manages the excitable captain (Raleigh Bond) and all his men, we get fine acting and faces that are not boringly familiar.

Moreover, there is an enjoyable feeling about the film, as if the actors are having a good time in their roles.

A plot with a little more weight, a little more tension, would have been appreciated; still, "The Black Marble" is an entertaining movie of unconventional charm.

NEW RELEASES

ALL THAT JAZZ (R). Tour de force by writer-director Bob Fosse. Roy Scheider plays hard-driving, fast-living choreographer (Fosse) in "behind the scenes" story of unusual imagination and energy.

AMERICAN GIGOLO (R). Seamy tale about rich widows, dirty politics and a stud who gets framed for murder.

AND JUSTICE FOR ALL (R). Al Pacino is a young trial lawyer dedicated to his profession and profoundly troubled by the legal system.

BEING THERE (PG). Peter Sellers is a TV-educated economist in satire that pokes fun at our political and social consensus.

BLACK HOLE (PG). Disney's expensive entry into sci-fi, space adventure with strong cast and action story.

THE BLACK MARBLE (PG). Paula Prentiss and Robert Foxworth in offbeat, romantic comedy about two ill-matched L.A. cops.

BLACK STALLION (G). Story about a boy and a horse told in rich visual images. Terrific performance by Mickey Rooney as an ex-jockey who befriends the boy.

CHAPTER TWO (PG). Autobiographical Neil Simon story about a man starting over after death of his wife.

COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER (PG). Sissy Spacek is outstanding as Loretta Lynn in movie bio of country singer's grueling early years and troubled success.

CRUISING (R). Heavy leather story of police undercover agent (Al Pacino) looking for psychotic killer in homosexual community.

ELECTRIC HORSEMAN (PG). Jane Fonda is a reporter and Robert Redford an ex-rodéo champion in satirical comedy.

FATSO (PG). Anne Bancroft debuts as writer-director and co-stars opposite Dom DeLuise in comedy about fat man's efforts to get thin.

THE FOG (R). Horror film from John Carpenter, who directed "Halloween." Supernatural fog, associated with legend of mariners rising from their graves and seeking vengeance, creates havoc in coastal village.

FOXES (R). Four teen-aged girls in California coping with the adult world and parental neglect.

GOING IN STYLE (PG). Offbeat comedy about three pensioners who decide to "go in style."

HERO AT LARGE (PG). A struggling actor (John Ritter) tries to live up to image of his role as Captain Avenger.

HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT (PG). James Caan attempts to find his children who have disappeared with stepfather given a new identity by the government.

THE IN-LAWS (PG). Hilarious comedy with Peter Falk and Alan Arkin as near-relatives who not only plan a wedding but rip off the U.S. Mint.

THE JERK (R). Steve Martin in comedy about a white boy raised by black sharecroppers.

JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT (R). Alan King excels in straight role as millionaire confronted by his rebellious mistress, Ali McGraw.

KRAMER VS. KRAMER (PG). Perceptive, well-acted drama about a broken marriage and a custody battle. Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep star.

THE LAST MARRIED COUPLE IN AMERICA (R). George Segal and Natalie Wood in sometimes-abrasive comedy about problems of staying married in the midst of friends who are divorcing.

LITTLE DARLINGS (R). Tatum O'Neal and Kristy McNichol are two teenagers who go to summer camp and wager who will lose her virginity first.

LITTLE MISS MARKER (PG). Remake of the Shirley Temple classic from Damon Runyon story about a bookie who will lose her virginity first.

1941 (PG). John Belushi and host of others in comedy about mythical Japanese attack on Los Angeles.

NOTHING PERSONAL (PG). Tweedy professor (Donald Sutherland) goes to Washington and meets sexy lady attorney (Suzanne Somers).

THE ROSE (R). Bette Midler as '60s rock star living life of emotional extremes that suggest some parallels with career of Janis Joplin.

THE SEDUCTION OF JOE TYNAN (R). Familiar story about the pressures of a "decent" politician, Alan Alda. Hackneyed situations are redeemed by the acting of Barbara Harris, Meryl Streep and Rip Torn.

what's at the movies

THE SERIAL (R). Life among the trendy fold of Marin County.

SIMON (PG). Comedy with Alan Arkin as brainwashed professor who believes he is an alien from outer space.

A SIMPLE STORY (Unrated). The minding agonies of turning 40 trouble successful career woman (Romy Schneider).

10 (R). Comedy with Dudley Moore who tussles out his tenured roommate, Julie Andrews, in his search for the perfect "10."

THE TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS (Unrated). Epic film of life of Italian peasants at turn of century.

WHEN TIME RAN OUT (PG). Irwin Allen disaster flick (if you can't make them better, give them more) with volcanic eruption, earthquake and tidal wave.

WINDOWS (R). Weird twist of plot in ridiculous film about rape victim.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

G General audiences admitted.
PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
X No one under 18 admitted.

Al Hirt will appear on opening concert

concerts

Dixieland trumpeter Al Hirt leads off a host of pop-music entertainers at the Meadow Brook Music Festival's Friday night variety series opening June 27 on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

The hillside Baldwin Pavilion will come alive with the varied musical sounds of jazz, folk, country and swing, plus an appearance by one of America's favorite comics.

The Kingston Trio and Mary Travers, known for her work with Peter, Paul and Mary, will help the Meadow Brook crowd celebrate the 4th of July, followed by fireworks.

On July 11, three jazz bands will come together, Lionel Hampton and his orchestra, Buddy Rich and his band, and Woody Herman and his Thundering Herd.

LORETTA LYNN, whose life story is

told in the new movie, "Coal Miners Daughter," will appear July 18 on a program with fellow country singer Buck Owens.

On Aug. 1, song stylist Nancy Wilson will appear with the Duke Ellington Orchestra conducted by Mercer Ellington.

The Preservation Hall Jazz band will "march with the saints" on July 25.

Broadway musical-comedy star Carol Channing will arrive Aug. 8 to perform for the festival audience.

Tex Beneke and His Orchestra will swing into Meadow Brook on Aug. 15 for a nostalgic salute to the Big Band sounds of the 40s. Beneke is being joined by singers Helen Forest, Johnny Desmond and the Modernaires.

MOVING AND ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

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Robert Foxworth is another detective assigned to the case in "The Black Marble," a comic, offbeat love story.