

the movies

Louise Snider

## 'Dead Men' spoof has best moments with old film clips

When it comes to movie titles, "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid" (PG) has to rank among the most imaginative.

If some of that same imaginative spirit had gone into the rest of this new movie by Steve Martin, it might have been a comic knock-out. Instead, it's more like a 15-round draw.

"Dead Men" is entertaining, but the humor is largely derivative. The movie is a spoof of the dark, melodramas and hard-boiled detective flicks of the 1940s and '50s.

The zany story is built around nearly 20 film clips from these old movies. ("Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid" is in black and white in order to get a good match with the clips.) For anyone who is a dedicated moviewger, the interest in "Dead Men" is to savor the moments from these oldies and see if you can name the movie from which each film clip came.

THE PARADE of stars includes Alan Ladd, Barbara Stanwyck, Ray Milland, Ava Gardner, James Cagney and Lina Turner, among many others. If you can't identify the stars or the movies, don't worry about it. They're listed in the credits at the end.

Encountering all these people is Steve Martin as Rigby Reardon, a private detective in the manner of Philip Marlowe. He has been hired by a beautiful client (Rachel Ward) to find her father's murderer.

He is slugged, drugged and shot as he stumbles about seeking clues, motive, evidence and killer. Martin as the battered detective and Ward as the "classy" dame slip into their roles easily, as does Carl Reiner as a crazed Nazi who wants to destroy the world with cheese molds.

The script was written by Reiner, Martin and George Gipe and directed by Reiner. However, the people who really give this movie continuity are the technical personnel — the set decorator, Richard Goddard, and the set designer, Sig Tingloff, who matched the new movie to the old clips; the costume designer, Edith Head, who found the right look for everybody (this was Head's last work before her death); and, especially, the film editor, Bud Molin, who did such a superb job of smoothly integrating the old scenes with the new movie.

Steve Martin fans probably will be pleased to see him back in the mainstream, more or less, after the bizarre turn his career took with "Pennies from Heaven." "SHIL," "Dead Men" does not compare in originality and comic force with Martin's earlier success, "The Jerk."

I FIND IT disappointing that such comic talents as Martin and Reiner can't come up with something more original than satirizing old films (Mel Brooks did this too in "High Anxiety" and "Silent Movie").

Since Martin already has satirized the musicals of the 1930s and '40s in "Pennies from Heaven" and the detective movies of the '40s and '50s in "Dead Men," I hope he is not planning on making a career out of exploiting each film genre — war movies, westerns, horror flicks, and so on.

Whether he does or not might depend on how "Dead Men" fares at the box office. Who knows?



Steve Martin is Rigby Reardon in the takeoff on the detective-movie genre "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid."

## what's at the movies

**BEACH GIRLS (R).** A lighthearted, if a little ribald, tale of summer vacation antics at a borrowed beach house.

**CHARIOTS OF FIRE (PG).** True and compelling story of two runners. One runs for the glory of God, the other to battle bigotry. Outstanding and elevating movie.

**DEATHTRAP (PG).** The film version of Ira Levin's comedy suspense thriller starring Michael Caine, Christopher Reeve and Dyan Cannon.

**IF YOU COULD SEE WHAT I HEAR (PG).** Based on the life and experiences of Tom Sullivan. True story of bitter-sweet love and the fun and games most college students engage in just prior to entering the "real" world.

**MEPHISTO.** Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language film. Based on the Klaus Mann novel, a violent indictment of the Nazis, which was banned for decades in Germany.

**MONTENEGRO.** Bored wife of diplomat in Switzerland discovers earthy pleasures in cafe where Yugoslav workers meet.

**PORKY'S (R).** Director Bob Clark's rowdy, raunchy comedy of adolescence derives its title from the name of a notorious redneck dive, to which six lusty teen-agers are hypothetically drawn.

**QUEST FOR FIRE (R).** This science-fiction epic follows three courageous warriors forced to venture beyond their tribal lands when their life-sustaining flame is lost during a battle.

**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.



Leslie Cohen (front row, left), 13, of Covington Junior High School; Shannon Burrows, 12, of Covington; Ted Halbert (back row, left), of Covington; Matt Gray, 11, of Midvale Elementary School; and Kevin Burrows, 13, of Covington are more of the 12 youngsters who comprise the Kid Connection. Age range of performers in the showcase is 10-18.

## Kids strut their stuff in musical production

The Kid Connection, a new, professional showcase of children's talent, will perform at 8 p.m. Friday, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday and 8 p.m. Sunday at Seaholm High School Auditorium in Birmingham.

Sidney Burrows, showcase producer, said, "It is my goal to perpetuate live stage and television opportunities for exceptionally talented Detroit youngsters."

"Four youngsters selected out of the 12, I'm proud to say, are from Birmingham, the performing arts capital of the Detroit area."

At Seaholm, the Kid Connection will present a Broadway-type revue, with many numbers from the movie "Fame," a commercial medley, original music by a local young composer and a parody on Disney.

Tickets at \$6 are available at the door and also at CTC outlets including Kay Baum in Birmingham, Ralph Travel in Bloomfield Township and Somerset Mall in Troy.



Heather Schneider (left), 11, of Hickory Grove Elementary School; Larry Schwartz, 13, of Detroit Country Day School, and Julie Barker, 11, of Schroeder Elementary School are part of the Kid Connection.

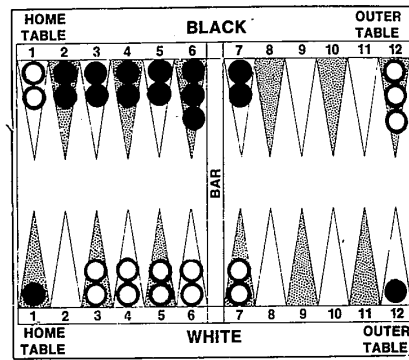
**backgammon**  
**Mike Giordano**  
 of the Cavendish North backgammon club

• TO HIT OR NOT TO HIT

"When in doubt, hit."  
 I have heard this sage advice offered over the backgammon table almost daily. And I suppose it makes about as much sense as any other blanket statement used to replace the reasoning process in problem solving.

In the example, white rolls a 4-1 and must decide whether to hit the checker on the white 12 point. It is certainly tempting to put a second man behind our fine blockade, but the overriding question is whether that play will improve white's chances of winning the game.

If we do hit and black re-enters on our 1 point, his position is all but hopeless since he will have to break his prime within a roll or two while white will bring his two remaining men on the black 12 point into play, hopefully making his own prime.  
 If we hit black and he re-enters on our 2 point, the situation is not so clear. Black may escape that man before we



can block him in. In that case, the outcome of the game will depend on which side escapes with his back men first. Despite black's six-point prime, white would appear to have the best of it.  
 A third possibility exists when we hit — that black may not re-enter. In fact, black may stay on the bar for several rolls. In such a case, the longer black remains on the bar, the better his chances of winning become. White would continue to advance his board, ultimately closing out both of black's men and then breaking down from his 6 and 5 points. Not a very likely scenario but possible.  
 On the other hand, if we fail to hit the opponent's man and simply play from the black 12 point to the white 8 point, then the shoe would be on the other foot. Black would be forced to advance and break his prime. Since the average roll consists of slightly more than eight pips, black can be expected to break his prime on his third roll, maybe even sooner. White can reasonably expect to play four or more rolls

before he would be forced to halt black's progress by hitting his remaining stragler on the white 1 point.  
 It should be clear, then, that white should not hit in this situation. In fact, it is rarely correct to hit an opponent if he has a six-point prime with one or more of your men behind it. But like all

generalities, this piece of advice should be disregarded when reason dictates otherwise.  
 Questions about backgammon can be directed to Mike Giordano, c/o the Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

# DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE ON THE TOWN

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 The top video games available for your next party.  
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