



David Suchet, a Malta police inspector, shows Margot Kidder a murder weapon to get a confession in Jerry Loidor's production, "Trenchcoat." The mystery-comedy

is set on the Mediterranean island of Malta. It was directed by Michael Tuchner and written by Jeffrey Price and Peter Seaman.



the movies
Louise Snider

'Trenchcoat' makes case for better-written scripts

An unstable mix of mystery and comedy that is too thin to jell, "Trenchcoat" (PG) stars Margot Kidder and Robert Hays as two Americans playing detective on the island of Malta.

The movie is like a duck-billed platypus, a little bit of this and a little bit of that — a private-eye spoof, some slapstick comedy, a dab of romantic adventure. It also boasts the mandatory car chases and semi-bumbling police. All these strands are brought together in a ragged assemblage that has a very amateurish look to it.

Kidder is a court stenographer who wants to be a mystery writer. She goes to Malta for a two-week vacation in search of material for her novel. She doesn't have to search long. Her first day of sightseeing, she blunders into a murder.

Kidder would like to solve the crime through her own investigations. Unfortunately, "Trenchcoat" doesn't present the kind of mystery calling for the services of a sharp-minded detective. The emphasis is on Kidder's confrontations and narrow escapes, not on problem-solving.

BY MAKING A CACHIE of plutonium the prize everyone is after, the script need not bother about logic. It can, and does, simply introduce a number of people of different nationalities and races who are all after the plutonium.

Kidder is at the nuclear center of their activity because she unknowingly possesses the clue to the plutonium's location. Thus we have various people following her, attacking her and kidnapping her. Everyone is after her, it seems, except the police, who think she is a crazy, sensation-

seeking tourist.

The only person she can turn to for help is another American, Robert Hays, whom she met on the flight to Malta. At least, he believes her, and she can count on him. Or can she? Is he after the plutonium too?

"Trenchcoat," in spite of a couple of murders, is a lightweight film. Its assets are a scenically interesting location, Robert Hays' easygoing charm, Margot Kidder's throaty, sexy voice and a sturdy supporting cast playing various kinds of wacky people.

John Justin is quite funny as the stuffy manager of the quiet, conservative hotel where Kidder keeps disturbing the peace. Daniel Faraldo is Nino, a lusty Italian who is after Kidder for more than sex. Gila Von Weitershausen is a suspicious-acting German; David Suchet is the muddled police inspector; and Pauline Delaney and P.G. Stephens are a smiling Irish couple who give the young lovers encouragement.

ON THE NEGATIVE side, the movie lacks momentum, jumps about erratically and doesn't build to a climax. Even worse is its patronizing attitude toward the heroine. Although Kidder's character may be inept in looking for clues, when it comes to following someone, she hops in the car, then confesses she doesn't know how to drive a stick shift. She may be gutsy, but she is also naive, and it takes a man to rescue her.

Kidder and Hays are both fine actors with a real flair for comedy. They deserve better material, something more sophisticated, less Disney-ish.

what's at the movies

BETRAYAL (R). Jeremy Irons, Ben Kingsley and Patricia Hodge are caught up in emotional triangle in movie scripted by Harold Pinter.

CURTAINS (R). Horror film with Samantha Eggar and John Vernon facing "the ultimate nightmare behind the curtain."

THE ENTITY (R). Barbara Hershey stars as a woman who experiences the terrifying unknown presence intent on possessing both her body and soul.

48 HOURS (R). Action drama with comic flair features Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy as a white cop and a black cop who are forced to work together to track down two killers.

FRANCES (R). Powerful drama with Jessica Lange as Frances Farmer, the film actress whose independence and radical views led to a tragic downfall.

GANDHI (PG). Epic film about Mahatma Gandhi, political and spiritual leader who led movement for Indian independence from Britain. Magnificent performance by Ben Kingsley as Gandhi.

HIGH ROAD TO CHINA (PG). Action, romance and adventure as Tom Selleck and Bess Armstrong make their way across the orient in a race against time.

LOVESICK (PG). Dudley Moore and Elizabeth McGovern star in contemporary romantic comedy. Moore is a prominent psychiatrist who falls in love with his new patient, McGovern.

THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER (PG). Handsome adventure film from Australia presents mountain boy's passage into manhood. Kirk Douglas plays double role as two feuding brothers. Newcomer Tom Burlinson has title role.

SOPHIE'S CHOICE (R). Beautifully acted and photographed film based on William Styron's novel of a Polish immigrant (Meryl Streep), her volatile lover (Kevin Kline) and a young Southern writer (Peter MacNicol) whom they befriended.

SPRING FEVER (PG). Rivalry on the tennis courts turns into friendship for two young women, and their antics turn the town upside down. Starring Susan Anton, Frank Converse and Jessica Walters.

TABLE FOR FIVE (PG). Jon Voight is a divorced father trying to forge a more meaningful relationship with his children in this tearjerker.

10 TO MIDNIGHT (R). Action film with Charles Bronson. He's after the bad guys again, but this time with a badge, as he dispenses his own brand of justice.

TOOTSIE (PG). Offbeat comedy with Dustin Hoffman as a struggling New York actor who can't get a job until he dresses as a woman to audition for a role in a soap opera.

TREASURE OF THE FOUR CROWNS (PG). A quest to recover an ancient treasure leads to action and adventure in 3-D spectacle starring Tony Anthony, Ann O'Brien and Gene Quintano.

TRENCHCOAT (PG). Comedy-mystery with Margot Kidder as would-be mystery writer and amateur sleuth and Robert Hays as a helpful American on the island of Malta. Drippy but tolerable.

THE VERDICT (R). Strong role for Paul Newman as a cynical down-and-out Boston attorney who takes on an "impossible" malpractice suit.

WITHOUT A TRACE (PG). Suspenseful drama of a mother and a police detective engaging in a relentless search for the woman's missing son. Kate Nelligan, Judd Hirsch, David Dukes and Stockard Channing are featured.

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.

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