



Detectives Keller (Al Pacino) and Touhey (Michael O'Neill) about his extramarital dating (John Goodman) question Raymond Brown

This 'Cookie' crumbles as slow-paced comedy

"The Two-Headed, Schizoid Scenario From Hell" is not the latest low-budget, schlocky epic — it's a late-summer striking screenwriters and this week's two major releases, "Cookie" and "Sea of Love," are perfect examples of films that haven't decided what they want to be when they grow up.

"Cookie" (C+, R, 90 minutes), under Susan Seidelman's ("Desperately Seeking Susan") direction was written by Nora Ephron ("When Harry Met Sally...") and Alice Arlen ("Alamo Bay").

One would expect such a talented crew could do a lot with a clever idea and a good cast. Not so, however, as "Cookie" crumbles under the slow-paced weight of a romantic comedy about reconciliation and bonding interwoven with a double-cross D.A./Mafia movie.

Big-time mobster, Dino Capisco (Peter Falk), is paroled after 13 years. Under the terms of parole he must go home to his wife, Bruno (Brenda Vaccaro) — the gummy dogs — even though his heart belongs to Lenore (Dianne West) with whom he had a daughter, Cookie (Emily Lloyd), about 18 years ago. Cookie is a tough, streetwise chick, long since alienated from her father.

Meanwhile, Dino learns from big-time developer Arnold Ross (Jerry Lewis) that his mob partner, Carmine Tarantino (Michael V. Gazzo), defrauded Dino of big bucks while Dino was in the slammer. As Dino takes action to get his due, mob war spreads, complicated by pressure from a federal attorney trying for headlines to bolster his run for governor.

Well, what will it be? Will Dino and his estranged daughter reconcile? Will Carmine's heaves hit Dino? Will the Feds nab somebody? The slow-paced, domestic comedy of Dino and Cookie learning to love each other gets in the way of the fast-paced mob action and the double-cross whereby Dino the Abyss outwit cops and robbers alike.

Part of the fun in such films is watching the hero/heroine outwit the bad guys, but "Cookie" has too many loose ends and the boat here is never clearly presented.

The other problem with "Cookie" is heavy-handed stereotypes. While the acting is good — Peter Falk does an excellent Peter Falk and Emily Lloyd is a very talented young lady — the gravely wheezing of mobsters and Brenda Vaccaro's semihysterical, "Brooklyn-broad" gets old pretty quick.

Al Pacino may not drop in a "Sea of Love" (C, R, 110 minutes), but somebody better throw screenwriter Richard Price ("The Color of Money") a life preserver before he goes down for the third time in a sea of maelstrom confusion.

Billed as an erotic suspense thriller, "Sea of Love" has Pacino as New York detective Frank Keller alternately pining and slobbering over Helen (Ellen Barkin). She returns those sentiments which are more erratic than erotic.

There isn't a great deal of suspense either as Keller tracks down a psychotic, serial killer. First, Keller teams with Detective Gruber (Richard Jenkin) who is married to Keller's ex-wife. Then detective Sherman Touhey (John Goodman) joins up with Keller.

If Pacino and Goodman generated more charisma, had better lines and more screen time together, they might have pulled it off as a duo in the over-popular buddy genre.

As it is, "Sea of Love" flounders badly in Keller's maudlin cynicism. He's just another divorced, burnt-out detective waiting for a good woman to save him from himself. That cliché needs buddy-buddy charisma, a meaningful love story, real suspense, or a script without loose



the movies
Dan Greenberg

Grading the movies

As	Top marks - sure to please
A	Close behind - excellent
A-	Still in running for top honors
B+	Pretty good stuff, not perfect
B	Good
B-	Good but notable deficiencies
C+	Just a cut above average
C	Mediocre
C-	Not so hot and slipping fast
D+	The very best of the poor stuff
D	Poor
D-	It doesn't get much worse
F	Truly awful
Z	Reserved for the colossally bad
	No advanced screening

ends and unexplained plot elements. Try all of the above, they're mostly missing in a "Sea of Love."

"Vital Signs" (F) is a romantic drama about five medical students who, rest assured, have all the usual problems of growing up and learning how to doctor people.

"Heart of Dixie" (F) features Ally Sheedy and Phoebe Cates in a story of Southern gentility in the late '50s as times began to change.

STILL PLAYING:
"The Abyss" (D-)(PG-13) 135 minutes. Despite excellent underwater sequences, this muddled and murky sci-fi sea saga sinks.

"Batman" (C+)(PG-13) 120 minutes. Michael Keaton is a dud in the title role but Jack Nicholson's Joker is terrific.

"Casualties of War" (B+)(R) 105 minutes. Grim, gripping and graphically violent story of Vietnam war.

"Cheats" (D-)(G) 75 minutes.



Peter Falk and Emily Lloyd star as a hot-tempered father-daughter duo who manage to outsmart both the mob and the law in "Cookie."

Slow, clichéd Disney in Africa epic that left its excitement at the airport.

"Dead Poets Society" (A-)(PG) 124 minutes.

Robin Williams' sensitive portrait of a fine teacher is complimented by excellent young actors as his students.

"Eddie and the Cruisers II: Eddie Lives!" (PG-13).

They're still looking for Eddie's body.

"Honey, I Shrunk the Kids" (B+)(PG) 105 minutes.

It's fun but it's not easy to be smug.

"Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" (B+)(PG-13) 120 minutes.

Good entertainment, but enough already.

"Kickboxer" (F)(R).

Vengeance and rescue are in order as an American kickboxer travels to Thailand.

"Lethal Weapon II" (B+)(R) 115 minutes.

Glover and Gibson do it again in high, albeit violent, style.

"Licence to Kill" (B+)(R) 105 minutes.

Number 16 in the 007 series with Carey Lowell as Dalton's lovely lady. Outrageous but entertaining.

"Lock-Up" (F).

Stallone's in jail and Donald Sutherland is the warden. Best wishes to the latter.

"Millennium" (PG-13).

Sci-fi thriller features Kris Kristofferson as government investigator who finds strange clues at airline disaster site.

"Nightmare on Elm Street V" (R).

Freddie's back.

"Parental Guidance" (A-)(R) 120 minutes.

Large, talented cast in complex, but entertaining story about a family which includes Jason Robards, Steve Martin, Tom Hulce, Martha Plimpton and Diane West, among others.

"Peter Pan" (A)(G) 77 minutes.

Disney's classic animation of Sir James Barrie's story.

"The Package" (R).

Gene Hackman and Joanna Cassidy in story of deceit on the international scene as career military man escorts prisoner back from Russia.

"Rebel Without a Cause" (F)(R).

Judd Nelson, Robert Loggia, Leo Rossi and Meg Foster in story of driven young man who becomes a killer.

"Romero" (A)(PG-13) 105 minutes.

Disturbing, frightening but provocative story of El Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero and the events leading to his assassination. Superb performance by Raul Julia in title role.

"Sex, Lies, and Videotape" (R).

Everyone's talking about this romantic comedy with James Spader.

"Time Trakker" (F)(PG) 105 minutes.

Follow that mad scientist in a stolen time machine.

"Turner & Hooch" (D)(PG) 85 minutes.

Man and slobbery dog bonding against background of confused — and confusing — murder investigation.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWING

Film pays tribute to comics

By John Monaghan
special writer

Documentary filmmaker Ron Mann was reading a comic book in an airport lounge when he noticed people around him giving strange looks. He saw his mission — to convince people that comic books are an art form, not just junk culture.

His resulting film, "Comic Book Confidential," traces the history and future of comics, and it's as entertaining and offbeat as the works themselves. The award-winning film screens this Friday and Saturday at the Detroit Film Theatre.

Faster than a speeding bullet, "Comic Book Confidential" breezes over the creation of superheroes like Superman, Batman and Captain America.

After the war, comic books had other battles to fight. William M. Gaines, publisher of the gruesome "Tales from the Crypt" and "Dark Science," is grilled during Senate subcommittee hearings on juvenile delinquency — a forerunner of the anti-Communist inquisition of Joseph McCarthy.

And in another amazing piece of archival footage, a TV show preaches the evils of comic books on modern youth. Glassy-eyed children look on while a narrator warns that comics promote "sexual perversion" and the most despicable of crimes.

INTERVIEWED today, Gaines says censorship had a "chilling effect on the art of the business." Artistic freedom in mainstream comic books didn't really return until the 1980s.

There were, however, mavericks working outside the superhero realm. Robert Crumb, for instance, relates in the film how he quit his job at a Cleveland greeting card company to create the drug-inspired "Mr. Natural" and "Keep on Truckin'." Director Mann understands that kind of passion. To get the film he wanted, the Toronto-based filmmaker scraped together \$325,000 in funding, "borrowed" spare film stock from other projects and talked technician friends into working for part of the profits.

For Mann, "Comic Book Confidential" is the third in a trilogy of documentaries about artists. The others, "Imagine the Sound" (1980) and "Po-

etry in Motion" (1984), dealt with experimental jazz and poets respectively.

In each film, he has steered clear of the dry documentary style. Instead of simply interviewing the artists, he asks them to narrate stories while he pans back and forth across their panels. Although some are self-conscious, Will Eisner, creator of The Spirit, confesses that "most of us in the field are closet actors anyway."

In THE '80S section, he talks with Lynda Barry, Art Spiegelman and Bill Griffith, whose Zippy The Pinhead may soon have his own feature film.

"If you can't say something nice," Griffith comments on the clown's success, "say something surrealist."

The film is only slightly marred by its noble concept. A decade ago, comics were indeed outcasts — and falling limely. Today, they are a billion dollar industry, more respected than ever and read by as many intellectual adults as children.

Anyone paying to see a movie called "Comic Book Confidential" already realizes the power of the art.

SCREEN SCENE

ANN ARBOR FILM CO-OP, various locations on the University of Michigan campus, 435 S. State, Ann Arbor, Call 769-1767 for information. (\$2.50 single, \$3.50 double feature)

Altmoderat — "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" (Spain 1984), 7 p.m. Sept. 23 and 9 p.m. Sept. 24 (for location). A double feature of early works from Spain's hottest director begins with this typically kooky study of a lower middle-class family in Madrid. With "Dark Habits" (Spain — 1984), 9 p.m. Sept. 23 and 7 p.m. Sept. 24, about crazed nuts.

ANN ARBOR SILENT FILM SOCIETY, Berkshire Hilton, 1-4 at State, Ann Arbor. Call 761-8288 for information. (\$2.50 general admission, \$3.50 members)

"Hearts of the World" (USA — 1981), 3 p.m. Sept. 24. D.W. Griffith's epic World War I story filmed in England and France was made in an effort to dispel America to enter the war. Lillian and Dorothy Gish star with Eric Von Stroheim as a lusty German.

CENTER FOR JAPANESE STUDIES, Lorch Hall, 909 Monroe, Ann Arbor. Call 764-4307 for information. (Free)

"The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum" (Japan — 1939) at 7 p.m. Sept. 23. Kenji Mizoguchi's simple story of a young Kabuki actor who struggles to master his craft. Another in a series of rare Japanese films.

CINEMA GUILD, Lorch Hall, 909 Monroe, Ann Arbor. Call 494-0207 for information. (\$2.50 single, \$3.50 double feature)

"Comedies" (France — 1937), 7, 8:30 and 10 p.m. Sept. 23 (call for location). More from under-rated French director Jacques Dellon, about a couple's complica-

tions when they arrive at a country home for the weekend.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave. Detroit. Call 832-2730 for information. (R)

"Comic Book Confidential." (Canada — 1988), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Sept. 23-24. Fast-paced documentary about the history of comics in North America, including interviews with several well-known artists — William M. Gaines, Stan Lee and Bill Griffith among them.

"On the Waterfront" (USA — 1954), 5 and 7 p.m. Sept. 24. An old woman and her daughter survive by stealing the armor from downed soldiers during Japan's civil war. A harrowing, haunting film presented in glorious wide screen.

LIVONIA PALM CINEMA, 29415 Sevenson Mile, Livonia. Call 476-1166 for information. (Free)

"Now, Voyager" (USA — 1939), 10 a.m. Sept. 19. Schumacher, the deeply entertaining melodrama stars Bette Davis as a sheltered spinster who falls in love with dashing Paul Henreid while helping a shy young girl. As part of the film's ambitious month-long tribute to Bette Davis.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 14301 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. For information, call 669-8397. (\$4 regular and \$3.25 students and senior citizens)

"Grapes of Wrath" (USA — 1939), 7 p.m. Sept. 18-20. John Ford meets John Steinbeck in this classic tale of homeless farmers and their struggles during the Depression. Perhaps Henry Fonda's greatest role.

REDFORD THEATRE, 17350 Lahser,

Detroit. Call 537-2560 for information. (Free)

"Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" (1954), 8 p.m. Sept. 22-23. When Howard Keel decides it's time to get hitched, his wild brothers follow suit. An inspired musical starring Jane Powell and directed by Stanley Donen.

TELE-ARTS, 1540 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 963-3918 for information and show times. (\$12 adults, \$8 students and senior citizens)

"Love Is a Dog from Hell" (USA — 1988), Sept. 20-24 (call for show times). Three episodes, all based on the writings of Skid Row poet and cult figure Charles Bukowski. He is depicted at age 12, 19 and 33 while exploring trademark themes of brutality, sex and, of course, drinking.

"Exquisite Corpse" (USA — 1988), 10 p.m. Sept. 22-23 and 3:15 p.m. Sept. 24. In a twist on "Midnight Cowboy," an Oklahoman arrives in New York City with dreams of stardom only to undergo one bizarre experience after another.

"Voice of Sarafina" (USA — 1988), 3:30 p.m. Sept. 23. Behind-the-scenes look at the 28 South African school children who performed "Sarafina" at the Lincoln Center in 1987. Featuring singer Miriam Makeba in a stirring finale.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN, Recreation Center, 4901 Evergreen, Dearborn. Call 993-5390 for information. (Free)

"Dangerous Liaisons" (USA — 1988), 7:30 p.m. Sept. 20-21. Sexual politics with the Marquise and Vicomte, wickedly played by Glen Close and John Malkovich.

— John Monaghan

VIDEO VIEWING

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

In the '50s, Hollywood box office suffered as viewers stayed home to watch television. The movies retaliated with the slogan, "Movies are better than ever!"

While that wasn't necessarily true, films in those days certainly grew bigger, longer and more extravagant as Hollywood offered what black-and-white TV on small home screens couldn't — wide-screen, technicolor extravaganzas.

CBS-Fox Home Video has just released four of those blockbusters in a package called "Swords and Sandals." All are unrated and in color. Each may be rented separately. While there's plenty of cleavage and epic battles, it's pretty much G or PG stuff by today's standards.

"Swords and Sandals" includes "Demetrius and the Gladiators" (1954, 101 minutes) with Victor Mature and Susan Hayward. Mature also stars in "The Exploits" (1954, 139 minutes) with Jean Simmons, Gene Tierney and Peter Ustinov.

Susan Hayward and Gregory Peck headline "David and Bathsheba" (1951, 116 minutes) while Stewart Granger, Pier Angeli and Anouk Aimee star in "Sodom and Gomorrah" (1963, 148 minutes). That's almost 8 1/2 hours of "big-budget, biblical blockbusters with casts of thousands."

If you watch them all, you'll overdose on moral rectitude, sword fighting and chariot racing, but at least one or two are worthwhile. Even on your small home screen, they are pretty spectacular.

STUDENTS OF "Genesis" may be surprised how Hollywood rearranged biblical history but then the movies always favored spectacle over accuracy. Along with "The Robe," these Twentieth Century Fox spectaculars were the product of Darryl F. Zanuck out-DeMilling Cecil B.

"Sodom and Gomorrah" is the lone exception. An Italian production filmed in Morocco, a Joseph E. Levine film directed by Robert Aldrich with Stewart Granger as Lot, Pier Angeli as his wife, Hith, the pillars-of-salt-to-be.

Stanley Baker is Prince Astoroth, scheming with the Helamite tribesman to take over Sodom and Gomorrah from his sister, Queen Bera (Anouk Aimee). She's particularly good, albeit the stereotypical evil queen. Rossana Podesta is Lot's daughter, Shuah. The music was by Miklos Rosta.

Despite all that talent, the plot — besides differing radically from the Old Testament — is pretty stodgy and leaden. Lot shows up with his portion of the Hebrew people after he and Abraham split. His arrival is manipulated for their own ends by the various forces in Sodom.

There's a pretty obvious moral lesson with soft and sexy living in Sodom representing the seductive evils of the city.

Sodom's wealth was founded on its control of salt mines and the original film had graphic sequences of slaves working in those mines, but that footage is missing in the current vi-

deo that runs six minutes' shorter than the original film.

THE SALT MINE sequences, like much of the film's violence, are pretty lame. It's a puzzle why that footage was excised. What's six minutes more when you've passed two hours? In those days, cameras had the good grace to avert their eyes at particularly unpleasant moments.

Now, of course, the lens zooms in and rubs our noses in the gore. And all this notwithstanding, "Sodom and Gomorrah" is worth watching, over and above its historical stature and position. There's lots of singing and dancing — the Hebrew children doing what we might term folk music while the Queen of Sodom has some suggestive court dancers doing some pretty slick dancing.

There's also lots of Helamite cavalry trotting around and if you watch closely, you'll be able to count a "cast of thousands." That was an idle boast. The battle scenes are expansive and quite impressive.

"Sodom and Gomorrah" is the longest and least successful of the "Swords and Sandals" package, but of the four are worthwhile. Of course, if you like one, try the others.

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