

what's at the movies

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES (R). Tom Cruise plays high school senior who hopes to get away from steeltown through a football scholarship.

AMITYVILLE 3-D (PG). There's more excitement at the mysterious house in Amityville, in this 3-D production starring Tony Roberts, Robert Joy and Christine Ebersole.

BIG CHILL (R). William Hurt, Kevin Kline and Glenn Close in drama about a group of college friends from the 1960s who are reunited by the death of a close friend.

THE BIG SCORE (R). Fred Williamson as Detective Hooks makes waves with the mob and the police force.

DEAL OF THE CENTURY (R). Chevy Chase is a munitions company president arranging a big deal between a Central American country and a defense contractor.

THE GOLDEN SEAL (PG). The Alutian Island sets the scene for tale of an innocent child and greedy adults.

LONELY HEARTS (R). Norman Kays plays man who joins lonely hearts club after death of his mother.

MR. MOM (PG). A young executive, played by Michael Keaton, trades places with his wife, portrayed by Terry Garr, when she goes out to work and he stays at home.



Matt Dillon as Rusty-James, a teen-ager trying to establish his own identity in Francis Ford Coppola's "Rumble Fish."

'Rumble Fish' needs stronger characters we can care about

Philip Barrons, guest critic for this week's movie review, is a humanities professor at Macomb Community College in Warren.

It has been said that in the world of filmmaking a creative life of 10 years is about as much as one can expect. There are obvious exceptions.

Charlie Chaplin quickly comes to mind, and this may be somewhat extended today as fewer and fewer films are made, thereby conserving "creative energy." But the recent release of Francis Ford Coppola's "Rumble Fish" gives the argument some degree of focus.

To discuss American films of the 1970s you can begin with his "Godfather" I and II and end with "Apocalypse Now." All three pictures are towering examples of cinematic excellence, yet within the last two years Coppola has given us three films, "One from the Heart," "The Outsiders," and now "Rumble Fish," and I feel it fair to ask, what has happened to Coppola?

Both "The Outsiders" and "Rumble Fish," taken from novels by S.E. Hinton, deal with youth as rebels but never give a clear focus on the object of the rebellion. The juvenile delinquent films of the 1950s, admittedly lacking in artistic achievement, at least provided the viewer with some dramatically acceptable "heavy." The cop, the father, the high school principal. The enemy was clear. "Rumble Fish" simply rumbles around without ever erupting.

The story, what there is of it, loosely flows around two brothers, played by Matt Dillon and Mickey Rourke, and their alcoholic father, Dennis Hopper. Motorcycle Boy (Rourke) is an almost mystical character who has been on the road discovering the meaning of life.

ROURKE'S PREVIOUS work, particularly in "Diner," has been excellent. He struggles with his character, but it lacks definition and this makes the task impossible.

I kept asking myself why he whispered all the time. It finally occurred to me that he didn't want to be heard. If only he could have made himself invisible.

At least in Rourke's performance there is a sense that he is trying to find a way into the character. Not so with Matt Dillon. He's been typecast in four films, "My Bodyguard," "Tex," "The Outsiders," and now as Rusty-James in "Rumble Fish."

The type is tough and stupid. We are never convinced of the former and never doubt the latter. His problem in the film, which is hardly an original story, is trying to measure up to his brother's reputation.

Yet we are never allowed to know enough about the Rourke character to understand Dillon's feelings of inadequacy. The father appears to be the most interesting character, but he is only minimally involved in the story, so we can only speculate as to his prior life.

Visually the film is interesting at times. Coppola is correct in shooting the picture in black and white rather than the soft colors he used in "The Outsiders." His use of time-lapse photography produces pleasant effects, but overall I thought, as I did in "One from the Heart," that it is simply a trick.

His manipulation of visual and sound elements is simply compensation for the lack of a well-defined story populated by interesting characters. Ultimately this is the most damaging problem with the film. We do not understand what is happening and, more precisely, we are not made to care about these people.

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