

the movies

Dan Greenberg

'Target' has lots of thrills

The world is not nearly as nice as we'd like to believe, and "Target" proves it in an exciting, suspenseful two hours.

Walter Lloyd (Gene Hackman) runs a small Dallas lumber yard. He leaves work early one day to collect his son, Chris (Matt Dillon), at the auto race track so they can see Mother, Donna (Gayle Hunnicutt) off on her trip to Europe.

The day is gray. Walter Lloyd's car is gray, the buildings, the mud, everything is gray and foreboding not only strains in the family relationships but Walter's all too gray and murky past as well.

Although we're never told why, Walter and Chris don't get along very well, probably because Chris is a college dropout and would-be race driver. There's also some unexplained strain in Walter's relationship with Donna, who would like his company on her European jaunt. The aura of mystery, of the unexplained, permeates their relationships so that it is almost expected, a realistically satisfying surprise, a week or so later, to learn that Donna is missing from her tour group, having been kidnapped in Europe.

MUCH TO CHRIS' surprise, his father has many hidden talents, which surface as the two of them rush to Paris to search for Donna. At the airport, Walter is accosted by a suspicious character holding Donna's bracelet. Before he can explain his mission, he's shot and the fast-paced race to save Donna begins.

Chris is continually amazed at his father's previously unknown skills and friends. These friends include contacts at the U.S. Embassy — clearly not commercial attaches — and the very lovely Lise (Victoria Fyodorova), a former colleague and lover.

Chris is in for a big surprise when Walter suddenly sports a pistol that he obviously knows how to use and speaks French and several other languages while driving a car like there's no tomorrow.

And there isn't... if they don't quickly find out who's trying to assassinate them at every turn. The intensity of the chase sequences, whether in car or on foot, on riverboats and bridges, and in every other imaginable place in town and country, add to the enjoyable suspense.

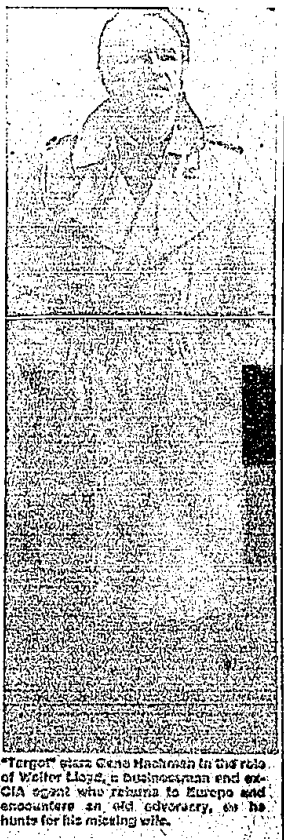
The richly and realistically filmed frames of European locales are appropriate backdrops for chase sequences which continue as they entertain. None of the commonly overdone mad, wrong-way chases on the freeway with one broken window and a barely dented fender to show for this day's work.

IT IS ALTOGETHER credible, as Gene Hackman plays it, that Walter Lloyd is an ex-CIA agent with a shadowy past and old skills that are the difference in survival.

The tableaux through which Walter and Chris rush to save Donna are peopled with attractive, well-acted characters who may very well be standing around Europe with guns, dollars and their bodies at the ready in the war for vengeance in our mad world.

Ultimately, their roles, the rationale for Donna's kidnapping and the subterfuge that haunts the world of espionage are largely unexplained. But no explanation is necessary, for "Target" is a realistic drama about the relationship that develops between father and son faced with a life-and-death mission to save their wife-mother.

You will fear for their safety, hold your breath in their battles and rejoice in their salvation.



"Target" stars Gene Hackman in the role of Walter Lloyd, a businessman and ex-CIA agent who returns to Europe and encounters an old adversary, as he hunts for his missing wife.

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