

Let's say hail to the conquering 'Hero'



JOHN MONAGHAN

TICKETS PLEASE

Stephen Frears' "Hero" re-invents Frank Capra for the '90s without the overdose of schmaltzy sentiment. This clever yarn about modern-day heroics and the media is as unusual and offbeat that audiences may be caught off guard not knowing exactly what to make of it.

To start with, this hero is no crusading Mr. Smith or Deeds; no George Kirby from "It's a Wonderful Life." Bernie LaPlante, played by Dustin Hoffman, is a money-grubbing, cynical schemer who just happens to be in the wrong place when a jet liner takes a dive.

In a wonderful piece of understatement, the crash is seen solely through the expression on Bern-

nie's face and the reflection in his glasses, he looks on not especially shocked at the potential of lost life, but with the profound look of "Why me?"

Reluctantly, he steps out of his car and into the pouring rain to answer the cries for help. Not once but three times he enters the burning plane to pull out injured passengers. He leaves the scene only to find that a \$1 million reward has been offered for the identity of the "Angel of Flight 407."

The only problem is Bernie can't collect the money. He's in jail for trafficking stolen merchandise. Because of his wild antics in the past, no one believes him. His ex-wife (Joan Cusack) says that such an unselfish act would be "against his religion."

Enter Geneva Davis's Gale, a hot-shot television reporter and survivor of Flight 407. Broadcaster by day, she's the man to get forward. The

mud on the hero's face obscured his identity during the mayhem, when John Bubber (Andy Garcia) steps forward, she and the rest of the world praise him as a hero.

The rollercoaster ride of frustration and chance leads to an interesting moral: there's a hero in all of us when placed in the right situation.

In different hands, this material would be Touchstone-sized and ordinary. Thanks to co-scriptwriter David Webb Peoples (the same pen behind the equally memorable "Unforgiven"), the story is wildly satiric but also subtle.

Stephen Frears, the talented director of "Dangerous Liaisons" and "The Grifters," gives the film a playful and unsettling edge. Even when the characters in his films get incredibly ugly, you can't take your eyes off of them.

Which brings us to Dustin Hoffman, who has quite simply

his most challenging role in years. Best are the moments when the divorced father and kleptomaniac tries to teach his kid the cynical facts of life.

Although Hoffman's neurotic shuffling and twitching keeps you glued to him during most of the picture, Garcia and Davis have their own moments to shine. Casting director Juliet Taylor, responsible for populating most of Woody Allen's films, helped assemble the supporting ensemble, which includes Tom Arnold as a bartender among other familiar character faces.

Although the film clocks in at almost two hours, it keeps a brisk pace reminiscent of the classic comedies of Capra, Howard Hawks or Preston Sturges. There isn't a wasted bit of footage or dialogue, especially in the newsroom scenes between Gale and her Cary Grant-like editor (an uncredited bit by Chevy Chase).



In the limelight: Gale Gayley (Geena Davis) is a reporter whose not about to let Bernie LaPlante (Dustin Hoffman) and a good story get away in "Hero."

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620 Men Seeking Women

AAA RATED, 42, 195 lbs, 37 yr, good looking, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

ACTHON

Shap guy in music related business. Always has concert tickets. Seeks sharp gal for concert dates and related activities. #4445

ATLANTIC, 43, white, male

195 lbs, 37 yr, good looking, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

A NICE, 28-40, white, male

195 lbs, 37 yr, good looking, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

AN UNDISCOVERED SINGLE BLACK MALE

195 lbs, 37 yr, good looking, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

ARE YOU THE BETTER YET, SKINNY

Single white male 6'2", 160, middle class, attractive, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

ANTHONY, contemporary, romantic

195 lbs, 37 yr, good looking, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

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DISCREET, INTERMEDIATE, relationship wanted. 195 lbs, 37 yr, good looking, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

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620 Men Seeking Women

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NICE GUY, 22, white, tall, short, professional, enjoys sports, moving, 195 lbs, 37 yr, good looking, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

NICE GUY, 22, white, tall, short

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SINGLE WHITE MALE, 28, looking for a woman 20-30 who's honest, 195 lbs, 37 yr, good looking, seeks single, white, 18-25, fun, outgoing, career, handsome, good fun. Must be attractive. See me. #4445

SINGLE WHITE MALE, 28, looking

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