

The Big Town: plot craps out but acting wins

review by Alan Small

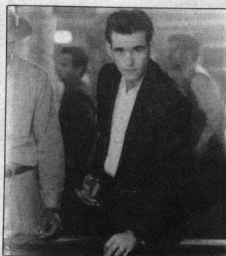
The *Big Town* is another one of those films that use that 50's schick that has been used so many times in film and on TV.

Matt Dillon plays J.C. Cullen, a young impressionable fellow from the farms of Indiana. During his spare time, Cully plays craps with his buddies and with his remarkable talent, ends up taking most of his friends' money home for the night.

An old, washed up dice-throver, Carl Hooker thinks that Cully has the talent to make it big, in the wild world of Chicago. So Hooker sends Cully out to the big city so Cully can rake in the big bucks.

In Chicago, Cully faces the real life of a big time craps shooter. While working for Ferguson Edwards and her blind husband (who are well played by Lee Grant and Bruce Dern), he sees big-time gamblers, the violence, and of course, the temptresses of the stage. They both are managers of the best "arms" in Chicago and are giving Cully a tryout to see if he is as good as he claims.

Luckily, for Cully, he makes a good living off his cut of the winnings so he decides to



Matt Dillon

take it down to the Gem Club, where all the big-time arms in the Windy City face off against each other. Cully just won't settle for ordinary success, so he breaks the bank, much to the chagrin of the club owner George Cole (Tommy Lee Jones).

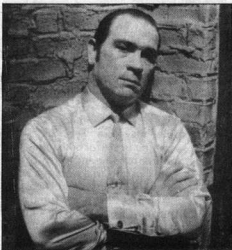
Cully then hits all the finest clothing shops to spread out his winnings, and ends up going out with two women. One, Lorry Dane, is a stripper at the Gem Club and is also wife of the owner, Cole. The other woman is Aggie Donaldson, a wholesome farm girl, trying to scrape up enough money to get educated, and to support her three-year old daughter.

After this, the plot goes through more cloverleaves and traffic circles than there are in the City of Edmonton. Cully ends up having to decide between the two women he is seeing while playing craps, getting drunk, and bankrupting the easily despised Cole.

The *Big Town* is one of those movies that you come out and say, that wasn't a bad movie. But it wasn't *Gone With The Wind* either. The plot seemed convoluted to me, but the acting was definitely first-rate, with Bruce Dern putting in a fine performance as the vengeful Mr. Edwards.

Many people would complain that the movie lacked realism. They would have a point, because at times, you would think that everything Cully does turns to gold. Heck, in a two-hour movie he craps out only once. And for a farm boy, he has pretty good street smarts. Although the movie was set in the 50's, Cully ends up making very good money by 1987 standards — let alone 1957.

But if you like gut-wrenching Bo Diddley tunes, some great suspense at the crap table, and some wild scenes of life in Chicago in the 50's, you will find *The Big Town* worth your film-going money. Otherwise, see it on 3-buck Tuesday or wait for it on video.



Tommy Lee Jones

Someone to watch over me would be better on TV

review by Tom Wharton

Someone to Watch Over Me is an innocuous movie. It features a plot which we have all heard before. Tom Berenger of *Platoon* fame plays Mike Keegan, a police detective from Queens, who is assigned to protect a beautiful society woman (Mimi Rodgers) from the killer whose crime she has witnessed. Keegan finds himself quite out of his normal working class element in her world of wealth and sophistication.

When the killer makes threats on the young woman's life, she turns to Keegan for support and, unlikely as it seems, they become romantically involved. Keegan's wife (Lorraine Bracco) discovers this and kicks him out of the house, whereupon the movie descends into a tedious montage sequence as the hero soul-searches through the New York streets.

Suspense builds again as the killer, attempting to get at the witness, takes Keegan's wife and son hostage. This, unfortunately, is an

all-too-familiar plot mechanism, allowing the erring hubby to get the bad guy and save his marriage at the same time.

Have I given away the ending? Yes, to this movie and several others.

Although lacking in originality, this film has its good points. Director Ridley Scott has crafted some excellent "mood" movies, most notably *Blade Runner*, and this latest is somewhat similar. There is the same effective use of dramatic lighting, visual richness and

music (a bit of the *Blade Runner* love theme can even be heard in one scene), as well as some very suspenseful moments. There are even some good laughs, especially when Keegan's gruff, matter-of-fact nature grates against the shallow slickness of the high society crowd. Sadly, there just isn't enough of a story to hold it all together.

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With so much emphasis on the "look," character development also suffers. There are so many shots of the characters either waking up or falling asleep or just lying around in bed that one feels the desire to go home and do likewise. The lead actors give fine performances, but it doesn't dispel the feeling that style is the star of this film. The lack of depth leaves one for the most part indifferent to the characters' problems. The only redeeming scenes were those of Keegan's home life, due largely to Lorraine Bracco's admirable portrayal of the detective's wife.

There may be some nostalgic charm in emulating the hard-boiled detective genre of the forties. It's always enjoyable to hear a bad guy say things like "Youse is a beautiful woman, see..." but *Someone to Watch Over Me* adds nothing new, and this makes it hardly worth the effort.

I don't want to be hard on this film. It had no major faults, and it was partially spoiled by the two loudmouths who sat behind me. But they did make one comment I agreed with: "This would make a decent TV movie."

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