

The Verdict is in...

by Nate LaRoi

Paul Newman is back. After a summer of race car driving and no-nukes campaigning, Mr. Newman has returned with his most brilliant acting performance since *The Sting*.

The film is *The Verdict*. The shoes to fill are those of prosecuting attorney Frank Gavin, a man who takes on the "impossible court case". Newman's wrinkled brow, his hazy eyes, his pained expression — all help to make this skid-row man with a mission believable and tragic. And yet Newman fills this character out. Here is a man as flawed as he is crafty; a man who alternates bouts of alcoholic self-pity with games of flippant pinball.

The plot itself is purely straight forward. Like *China Syndrome*, *The Verdict* is an attempt to personalize and dramatize issues straight out of the newspapers. The issue here is medical malpractice. Two doctors screw up. Their patient goes into a coma. The victim's family demands compensation. A David vs. Goliath court battle follows. Two small time lawyers vs. a well-respected hospital, the Catholic Church, and the biggest law firm in Boston.

All of this may seem a little cliched, but the well-intentioned story (directed by Sidney Lumet, screenplay by David Marmet) does clearly indicate the power that "the machine" can wield against the little man. Marmet and Lumet depict the court system not as a place that gives us justice, but rather as a place that gives us a mere chance at justice.

Still, Marmet and Lumet believe that human beings are basically good; they believe that there is justice in the human heart. "If we are to have faith in justice," they tell us, "we must only have faith in ourselves."

Nevertheless, in *The Verdict* all is not black and white; there are ulterior motives and subtle contradictions behind even the most straight forward actions. Virtually everyone seems to be acting as much out of self-interest and role requirements as out of principle. Even as our lawyer hero is preaching to the court about morals, one might postulate that he is doing it more out of a need for personal vindication than a need for justice.

Many characters apparently see good and evil as matters of convenience, as equally viable alternatives to be used interchangeably, depending on which best advances their own cause; other characters simply seem unable to judge their own actions with any objectivity.

Sometimes Lumet and Marmet push the point a little too far, putting the most ridiculous possible words into the mouths of the actors. One figure whose refusal to testify stands to devastate innocent people tells Gavin, "You guys are all the same. You don't care who you hurt. You're just a bunch of whores."

Such moments of supreme irony are interesting and thought-provoking (is this supposed to be a gag or do the producers think that lawyers are whores?). But what really sticks with you here isn't so much the issues as the acting (politically *The Verdict* is less successful than *China Syndrome*).

While Newman is clearly the stand-out, Charlotte Rampling's performance of Laura, Gavin's stiff-backed sometimes lover, is worthy of high-praise also. With support from Jack Warden (who plays Gavin's jittery partner) and James Mason (who plays the cunning defence attorney), Newman and Rampling make this film memorable.

Certainly *The Verdict* is not without its faults. The plot at times lacks realism; the themes aren't terribly deep or terribly hard to figure out. But on balance I have to rule in favor of this film. Then again, I guess we need a court of twelve to decide that now, don't we?

...with dissent

by Dave Cox

The Verdict struck me as a vehicle for Paul Newman to win an academy award, and not too much more. Admittedly, Newman's performance is good, but not his best. Everybody from Maclean's magazine down has called it so — can nobody remember *Cool Hand Luke*?

Director Sidney Lumet has also come a long way downhill since that absolute classic courtroom drama, *Twelve Angry Men*. Judge-and-jury shows have enormous dramatic potential, but they usually admit of only two endings: guilty or not guilty. *The Verdict* is as predictable as most.

Charlotte Rampling is certainly an actress one could become obsessed with (as Woody Allen did in *Stardust Memories*), but she is rather mistreated in this character. The scene where Newman slugs her is utterly unnecessary.

And to top it off, you can see Paul Newman's bald spot. I know he's supposed to be rumpled, but how our heroes are aging...

My verdict? Guilty.

Up & Coming

Friday/Saturday, January 7/8, 8 pm. Jubilee Auditorium. World Premiere of Fiala's *Overture Buffa*, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra with guest flutist Julius Baker. Sunday, January 9, 8 pm. Centennial Library Theatre. Jazz concert featuring the Brayne Band. \$5.00 at the door.

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the restaurant filled and a large crowd arrived. Surprising, considering it was the middle of the week. All in all, everything seemed to bode well- and we were not disappointed.

P. Prince, Jim (the two engineers) and myself began with drinks from the bar. Eventually we tried a couple of cocktails, including a pina coloda and pitcher of margaritas, and beer (what else does an engineer drink? P. replied they don't need anything else).

Along with our drinks we received a complimentary basket of tortilla chips and a delicious tomato dip with peppers. Thank god for ice-cold Bud.

My two companions ordered appetizers to start the meal while I settled for a soup. P. tried the Cevici Mexican, a dish of marinated scallops with chopped tomato, green onion, green pepper and green chile. As he enjoyed the Cevici, Jim indulged in a Mexican pizza, or rather a Cheese Crisp. It is actually a toasted tortilla covered with melted cheese, green chili strips, tomatoes and guacamole. I just enjoyed my creamy white cheese soup called Queso.

Our main course selection was complicated. We could choose from the house specials to any of the traditional Mexican dishes, including enchiladas, chile rellano and the taco. With the friendly help of our waiter, we translated the "Especialidades de Banditos" as "gringo dishes" for the weak at stomach. But the bottomless stomach P., would not settle for less than the authentic cuisine.

Jim warmed us up by ordering the Beef and Bean Banditos Burrito with rancher sauce. Jim explained his delicious soft flour tortilla, filled with the beef and bean combination, was well-rounded with the special sauce and melted cheese. We discovered that instead of ground beef, Banditos uses thinly sliced beef and it is superior.

I risked a Crab Enchilada. I discovered that there was no risk when I bit into the mouth-watering soft corn tortilla topped with red ranchero sauce and cheese. P. attempted a deep-fried burrito stuffed with beef. This is called a Beef Chimichangas. Between forkfuls P. expressed his deepest appreciation to the country of Mexico.

All the dishes were accompanied by traditional refried beans and rice. We also forgot to request the hot sauce on our meals, but found them to be tantalizingly spicy.

Though Jim and I expressed deepest satisfaction in our saturated state, the bottomless stomach decided dessert was in order. Twisting our rubber arms, P. and Jim ordered Deep-fried Ice Cream and I settled on the Flan. They took great delight in their deep-fried crushed-nut covered scoop of ice cream topped with a Grand Marnier chocolate sauce; I found the caramel custard flan acceptable, but envied the Grand Marnier chocolate sauce.

Surviving the evening, we decided to pay the tab. With \$40.25 for food and an extra \$25 for liquor, our total bill (as P. and Jim furiously beat up their calculators) was \$65.25.

I think engineers and reporters drink too much. (Amazing but true. We're writing to Ripley's tomorrow.)

Arts Editor's Note: This review was received before Christmas (nearly a month ago), and the author subsequently convinced the Gateway to have our Christmas dinner at Banditos. Below are a sampling of comments from the staff:

"No Pac-man game- this place gets four stars."

"Wow- like, this is tubular!"

"You could swim in these margaritas."

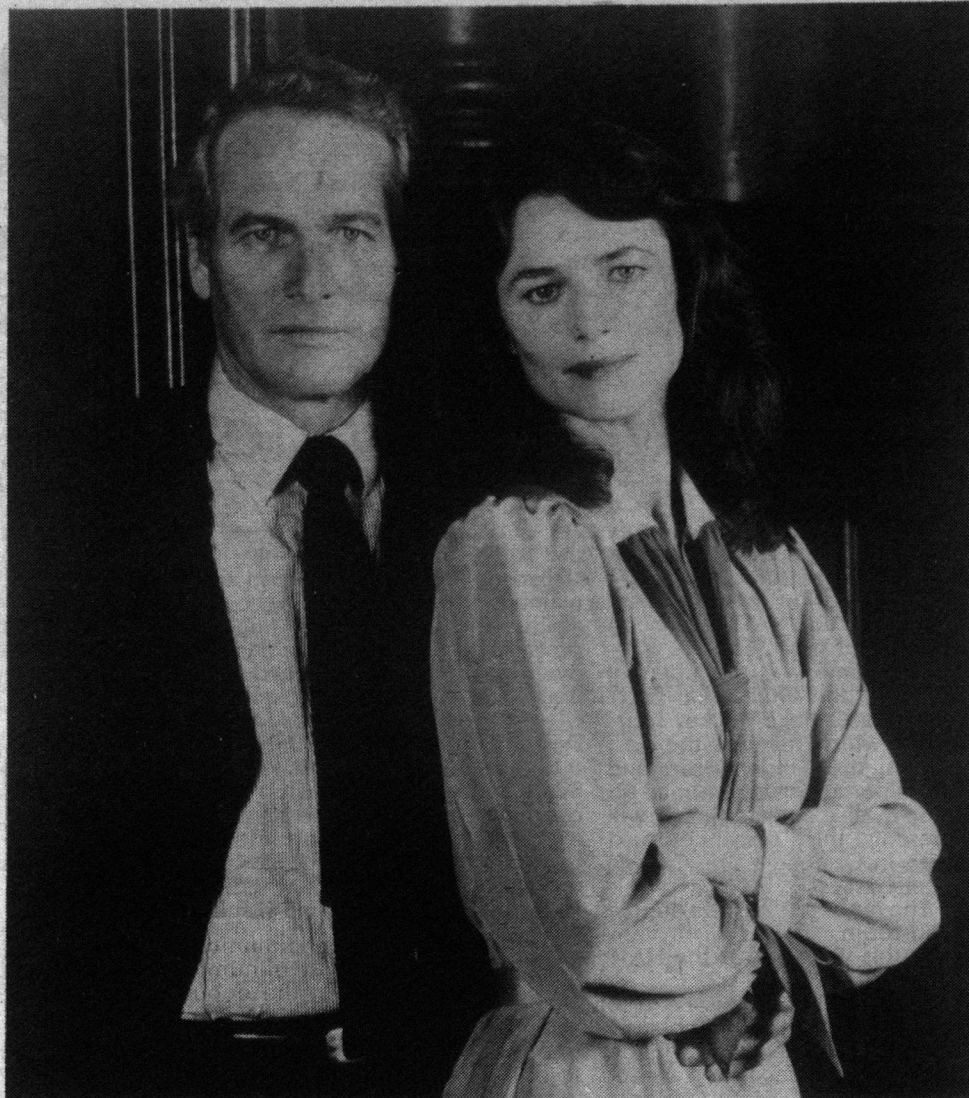
"Hmm- are these the right kind of beans?"

"The chicken was a bit stringy- it tasted kind of like tuna."

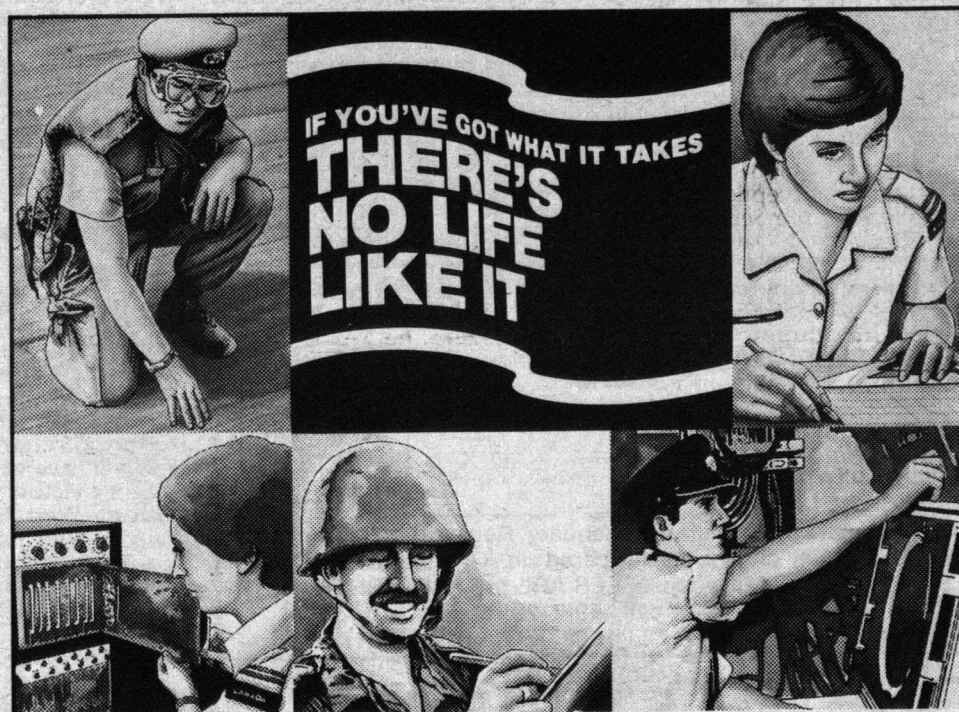
"Well, the beef was good."

"That cactus is covered with velvet."

I guess reporters do drink too much.



Paul Newman and Charlotte Rampling, stars of *The Verdict*.



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