

Cutter's Way:

# Why did Alex Cutter Cord?

Roman Pawlyszyn

At first, it was hard to imagine why such a fuss was being raised. After all, just how significant is the "Canadian premiere" of a film that has been playing commercially in the U.S. for over three months now? And how important is it to have such a film in the Gala series at the Festival of Festivals? There it was, though. The limousines, the beautiful people, and Jeff Bridges in the row in front of you.

Then, before the screening, an explanation was offered as to why Festival policy concerning Galas was waived. Despite the fact that *Cutter's Way* was already playing in the U.S., it was considered such an exceptional film that it deserved a Gala presentation. I don't know if that's justification enough, but let me take my turn in quoting about 39 other critics: "*Cutter's Way* is the best American film I've seen all year."

Set in a lushly-photographed Santa Barbara, the film stars John Heard as Alex Cutter, a one-eyed, one-armed, one-legged Vietnam veteran with a vengeance for society and a thirst for drink. His best friend, Richard Bone (Jeff Bridges) is a boat salesman cum gigolo who one evening witnesses the hazy details of a murder in a dark alley. Later, Bone thinks he recognizes the killer—J.J. Cord, a wealthy, respectable business tycoon—but soon realizes that his identification was open to question. This doesn't matter to Cutter, though. To the modern day pirate, Cord is a guilty man whether or not he actually committed any crime at all. It is

people like Cord, people who sent Cutter to Vietnam and turned him into a disillusioned man, who are guilty.

"They're all the same", Cutter says. "Their asses are never on the line." The fact that his friend Bone once thought he could identify a killer is enough for Cutter to condemn Cord and set the course for retribution.

Only a murder mystery superficially, at its core *Cutter's Way* deals with an insane man who eventually draws others around him into his own insane world. In particular, Cutter forces Bone to reconsider his own complacency, his own utter lack of concern for what is just. It may be nothing more than a mad

journey into hell, but at least Bone gets cornered into making some realization of awareness—about himself, and about the workings of the world around him. He does this by seeing Cutter's way—he may be mad, but for the viewer there is no escaping his message.

John Heard's portrayal of Cutter is brilliant—every nuance of this weirdo's character seems real and natural. Last seen in 1980's *Heartbeat*, playing Jack Kerouac, Heard clearly turns in the performance of his career in *Cutter's Way*. With the success of the film, he also seems to have broken a longstanding jinx on the movies in which he appears. Besides *Heartbeat*, his

previous flops have included *First Love* (a campus-crush flick co-starring Susan Dey), and Joan Micklin Silver's *Head Over Heels* which met the same fate that *Cutter's Way* almost did. When *Cutter's Way* was first released, it was pulled from the market after only one week (a result of United Artists executives still panicking over *Heaven's Gate* and one sweeping pan by the *New York Times*). Fortunately, it's been given a second chance and if only for Heard's performance, it deserves it.

Czech-born director Ivan Passer has taken quite a step forward from the string of semi-

schlocky American films he directed earlier, films like *Law and Disorder* (with Carroll O'Connor and Ernest Borgnine) and *Silver Bears*. *Cutter's Way* is a mature, sophisticated work, a vindication of the American cinema. It's the promise of Passer's potential—amply demonstrated in his early Czech films, the best-known of which is *Intimate Lightning*—being brought to fruition, a stylized and personal work.

*Cutter's Way* is not perfect, the flaws lying mostly within the screenplay, but it comes close. And yes, it's "powerful". It opens tomorrow at the prestigious Fine Arts Cinema on Yonge Street.

## Malevil cont'd

quiet becomes threatened, however, when they encounter other survivors. Of particular concern is a Stalin-esque figure known as "Monseigneur Directeur", a tyrant who proclaims himself to be the new Messiah and compels the survivors in his group to spend several hours each day worshipping him. Inevitably, when this maniac learns of the vegetation and cattle at Malevil, he declares war. He is defeated, but not before many are senselessly killed.

*Malevil* is one of those small-scale films that really works on the emotions in a big way. The cast consists of many notable French actors, including Michel Serrault (*La Cage Aux Folles*) and their performances go a long way in injecting a real life-blood into the film. The roles are certainly demanding, but the



Films have a direct and powerful influence on our lives. They open new doors of knowledge and enjoyment to people everywhere, and have become an integral part of the cultural life of all nations. The Festival of Festivals provides Canadians with the opportunity to view the very best films produced internationally, and has enjoyed immense success since its inception in 1975. To the organizers, I send my congratulations, and to all those taking part in this exciting event, my warmest wishes for an enjoyable and stimulating Festival.

The Prime Minister of Canada

characterizations are alive. Director Christian de Chalonge has chosen a difficult and unusual subject—he co-wrote the screenplay and has handled things with great restraint. The film is entirely believable. And the cinematography is beautifully evocative of hope.

The peaceful image of a small rural community amid the unlikely setting of atomic refuse: sunshine, smiles, people eating, doing farmwork, embracing. Abruptly, the peace is broken by crashing thunder. Is it another explosion to destroy the community they have wrought? No, it is a formation of

helicopters. As they fly over the horizon, they announce from the sky: "Prepare for immediate evacuation...By international treaty, the destroyed nations have been declared uninhabitable." The door of the helicopter opens and a heavily protected man wearing a gas mask emerges. This man doesn't understand, but the camera does—these lands are inhabitable. The people of Malevil inhabited them.

*Malevil* is a hopeful celebration, a sensitive, funny, touching film. It's warm movies like this one that make you wish these festivals would never end.

## Excalibur Staff Meetings

Thursdays at Three

111 Central Square



# Hey You!

Don't Chuck the Security Guard

JOINED AT THE HIP

featuring

Chas Lawther  
&

Suzette Couture

Wednesday SEPTEMBER 23

Advance tickets at  
Soundproof Records  
Licenced under L.L.B.O.

8:00 p.m.

Vanier  
Dining Hall

\$4.99 CYSF ADVANCE  
\$5.99 OTHERS & DOOR