

Movie hits a cinematic hitch

Cinematic excess

The Hitcher
Tri Star Pictures
Odeon

by Gilbert Bouchard

The 20th century has a new archetypal fear: the fear of the serial killer. A breed of killers, often clean-cut intelligent drifters that wander about North America taking hundreds of victims, seemingly beyond justice, leaving law enforcement agencies baffled and impotent.

What makes these killers so frightening is their invisibility coupled with the already faceless nature of our modern urban society. Unlike our parents and grandparents who lived in small towns among people they knew and trusted, modern urbanites live and survive among hundreds of strangers. We are forced to put so much trust in so many people that the thought that one of those seemingly harmless strangers being a threat to our lives strikes at the core of our sensibilities. Trust is more important to the urbanite than to a rural citizen. The small town rube can afford to distrust strangers, the urbanite can't.

That's why Tri Star Picture's newest release *The Hitcher* could have been such a scary film, and why it's such a disappointment.

The Hitcher explores the phenomena of

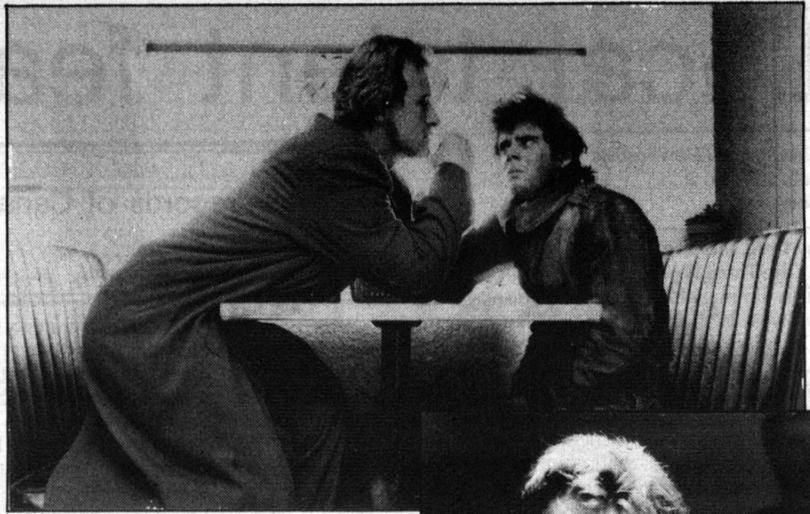
the serial killer and hits all the right nerves and exploits all the proper paranoia on the topic, but goes too far.

C. Thomas Howell plays Jim Halsey, a cute little boy next door who picks up a hitcher while driving from Chicago to San Diego. The Hitcher (Rutger Hauer) turns out to be a ruthless serial killer who engages Jim in a macabre cat and mouse chase across the southwestern desert.

I have no problems with the movie's premise, or even with its characters. The movie starts off chillingly enough, with Jim narrowly escaping his first encounter with the hitcher, but the filmmakers were not content with this subtle and realistic dramatic interaction between the movie's two leads, character after excess character is dragged into the action.

The hitcher starts knocking off policemen as easily as you or I would swat flies, and a waitress appears out of nowhere simply to provide Jim with a much-not-needed love interest and to inflate the body count.

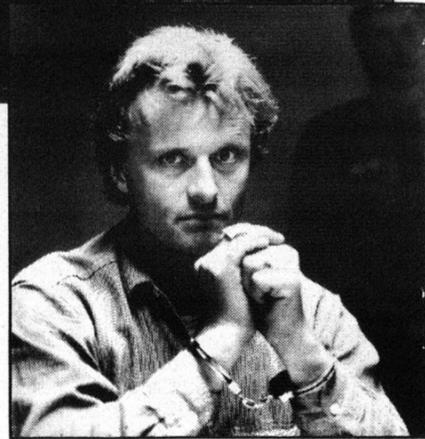
The best parts of the movie involve Jim's growing fear and irrationality as he futilely flees the hitcher. These are buried in the mass of characters and needless movement. Howell gives his character just the right balance of vulnerability and independence, foiling Hutger's more sophisticated, rugged



character, and manages to create a real feeling of dread and hopelessness surrounding his plight while not becoming pitiful. Hutger on the other hand is too static. His character is dropped into the movie whole and doesn't develop.

I also object to all the unnecessary violence. Multiple car crashes with dozens of cop cars and even a helicopter were uncalled for and weaken the film.

It's really too bad; while it had a good cast, a viable premise, and starts off good and scary, *The Hitcher* loses all subtlety and mucks about in the worst kind of cinematic excess.



(Top photo) Rutger hauer and C. Thomas Howell stare off. (Inset) Rutger Hauer.

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