

# "Hopscotch" is not a soap opera

by Frank McGinn

A General rated movie not from Walt Disney Studios is oddity enough, but *Hopscotch* goes one further. It is a General-rated movie not even aimed specifically at children. It just happens to earn a G-rating because there is not a brutal, profane or shocking moment in this affable, innocuous spy fantasy.

*Hopscotch* is about the espionage game. In fact, hopscotch is what it's hero, a

CIA field man of long experience, calls the espionage game. Miles Kendig (Walter Matthau) is one of the sides' most valuable players when he is summarily recalled from the field by an officious overlord named Myerson (Ned Beatty) and assigned to the filing department. Kendig has been operating under his own efficient but unorthodox game plan and Myerson wants to humble him back into the team. Instead Kendig quits and invents a new game, call-

ed writing your devastatingly accurate memoirs and mailing them to major intelligence agencies. The object for the world is to get Kendig; the object for Kendig is to see how long he can remain one step ahead.

It proves an amusing, relaxed chase. Not for *Hopscotch* the girls, gadgets, and gore of the old spy school, nor the faceless men performing grubby, little tasks in the grey morality of the new one. Breaking new turf in the spy

story polarization of good and evil, it pits the calm, humorous and capable, as personified by Kendig, against all the smug, officious pricks like Myerson. The top Russian agent in Western Europe (Herbert Lom) is a good guy because he plays the game well and because he likes a good joke. One of Myerson's aides (David Matthau) is a drip because he looks like one but the other (Sam Waterston) passes because he demonstrates a wry affection for the old fox they are chasing. Mature, intelligent Glenda Jackson is both an emblem of the forces of nice and a reward for their champion, Kendig. In this world being likeable pays dividends while being a rat wipes you out.

This amiable conceit is the main attraction of *Hopscotch*. Even in repose there is not a more likeable actor in America than Walter Matthau, whose sagging features and air of long-suffering patience make you want to pat him on the head and tell him he's a good, old dog, yes. When he actually strives to please, humming classical music in his funny, foghorn voice, pulling long faces and using all his tricks, he is irresistible. And Ned Beatty reaches equal heights

of petty nastiness in his portrayal of Myerson. A faceless, typeless actor, unlike Matthau, (Beatty) herein brings small, routine tyrannies to the big time with his constant rudeness to subordinates, his crass arrogance and his little homilies like "Sometimes bullying just doesn't work." It is fun to witness a contest in which pleasantness makes unpleasantness take its lumps.

It is not, however, terribly exciting or demanding. The idea that a senior KGB agent would be a warm Herbert Lom in a smooth, black fedora is appealing but he doesn't really do anything much. Glenda Jackson and Walter Matthau make warm, witty music together but they don't really say anything great. The concept of the secret agent's memoirs is lively but nothing much is done with it, beyond a few embarrassed remarks like "Christ, whose idea was it to send the poison cigars to Castro?" The development of the chase is orderly but uninspired.

In short *Hopscotch* is a small movie, easy to watch, easy to forget. It is as soothing and comforting as the steady putt-putt of a small outboard motor, and as powerful.

## Upcoming Movies

Robert Altman's *A Wedding* (1978), with Carol Burnett, is at the Rebecca Cohn, Sun. 19th. The same evening at QEH Led Zeppelin concert film *The Song Remains The Same* (winner of the Cannes award for most descriptive and apt title) shows at 7 and 9 p.m., tickets \$3.50 per show. Monday, Oct. 20th the Murder Mystery Series presents *Murder She Said* and *Witness for the Prosecution* (both based on books by Agatha Christie). Tuesday's experimental art films at 12:30 in the MacAloney Room and 8 in the Art Gallery include four Canadian films, one the Oscar-nominated "Nails," and another the Cannes award-winning "Romance of Transportation in Canada." Thursday, the 23rd sees the McInnis Room showing Bertolucci's *1900* (Robert DeNiro). Big news of the week is

Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* starting at Scotia Square on Friday.

*Smokey and the Bandit II* continues its lengthy run at the Oxford, and the Hyland and the Casino are holding over *Hopscotch* and *In God We Trust* (Marty Feldman) respectively. Paramount 1 and 2 are holding over *Ordinary People* and *Song of the South* (Disney). The latter is also opening Friday at the Cove. Penhorn 1 and 2 continue with Goldie Hawn in *Private Benjamin* and Lisa Eichhorn in *Why Would I Lie* respectively, while *Elephant Man* opens at Penhorn 3. Downsview 3 keeps *My Bodyguard*, which has done well in Halifax, while 1 opens with *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* and 2 starts *Middle Age Crazy* (still recommended). The NFB is showing a collection under the title of *Travel in Canada* on the 16th. Wormwood shows *Onibaba* on Friday, *Limelight* on Saturday and Sunday, and *The Dawson City Collection* on Wednesday.



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