

# Rumble Fish an unexpected success

review by Ronald Foley Macdonald

**Rumble Fish** is an unexpected success from a director who was dangerously close to being written off as an independent attempting to redefine the process of making films. Indeed, Francis Ford Coppola, director of "Apocalypse Now" and "The Godfather", gets the Robert Altman back-from-the-brink award for the best American movie of the year.

**Rumble Fish** stars Matt Dillon as the mumbling protagonist Rusty-James, who despite his limited vocabulary has inherited his brother's leadership role in the local Tulsa gang. Mickey O'Rourke, the philanderer of "Diner", is the older brother known only as "the Motorcycle Boy". He returns from California in time to save Rusty-James from some nasty business and to teach

him the futility of gang life. O'Rourke's character is the symbolic one, full of mythical proportions and infused with a great but terrible knowledge. Dennis Hopper is their ramshackle father, a welfare semi-bum drowning in liquid squalor. Tom Waits, the be-bop beat singer/songwriter, plays a be-bop beat lunch counter clerk. These three older characters all attempt to articulate the pitfalls of the rough and ready life, but words just don't seem to mean much in a universe like this. Consequently the film's dramatic action comes not from dialogue but rather from visuals.

And what visuals! The black and white photography (there are just two moments when there is colour) is absolutely stunning; the camera angles are such that the characters seem like displaced gods let loose in

some abandoned scrapyard Olympus. There is much camera movement and the violent scenes are explosive. "Rumble Fish" looks like a mad cross between "The Warriors" and "The Elephant Man". Natural beauty doesn't exist, everything is shrouded in wild dust and fog.

Susie (S.E.) Hinton, who wrote the novel and collaborated on the screenplay, must be seen in a new light after "Rumble Fish". She is no longer just a writer of trash teenage existentialism; she is now an important writer of trash teenage existentialism. It is odd how her two books that have recently graced the screen (both with the perpetually perplexed Matt Dillon), Tim Hunter's "Tex" and Coppola's rather bloated "Outsiders", did not have the cinematic potential of "Rumble Fish". Perhaps she learned how to write in the

interim.

By the way, if you didn't know yet, Stewart Copeland of the Police did the soundtrack (exclusively!) and it's the icing on the cake. Quite offbeat and original, the music consists of some effective urban reggae-ish shuffles and lots of neat percussion melodies that add to the oppressive atmosphere of the film.

All in all, "Rumble Fish" redeems Francis Ford Coppola. All the bad press, all the absurd stories, and all the charges of technological over-indulgence fall by the wayside in the face of "Rumble Fish". Sure, it may not make "One From the Heart" any better, or salvage "The Outsiders", but it is nice to know that one of the great contemporary American directors can still wow 'em.

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## Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams



Review by Geoff Martin

"You and your master are wretched paupers, Jews, worse than the Germans," he (Zahar) said. "I know that your master's grandfather was - a hawker in the street-market!...And his mother used to sell stolen and worn out clothes from a stall."

- Oblomov's manservant to a porter, in *Oblomov* (1859), Ivan Goncharov

David Shipler, former Moscow bureau chief for the *New York Times*, has written a brilliant and enlightening book of Soviet society today, entitled *Russia: Broken Promises, Solemn Dreams*.

The strength of the book lies in Shipler's sensitivity and astute perceptions about Soviet society. He is not content to simply

*Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams*  
by David K. Shipler  
Times Books, 1983, 404 pages

regurgitate the "Evil Empire" rhetoric of the Reagan mentality or that of the worker's paradise spouted by the apologists of the Soviet Union.

There is no doubt the Soviet Union has indecent domestic policies, Shipler clearly reveals. But he goes far beyond that. His two goals are to reveal and explain the domestic reality in the U.S.S.R.

In detached rather than bell-couse prose, he describes in great detail the authoritarianism, conservatism, elitism, xenophobia and social breakdown in the Soviet Union. He attributes manifestations of social breakdown, including high divorce rates and juvenile crime, to the historical causes of rapid urbanization and industrialization, among other things.

Russian fears of invasion and dislike for Germans, Jews, foreigners and working people are hang-overs from Czarist Russia. One can see this in reading nineteenth century Russian literature, as the opening passage above illustrates.

Shipler delves so deeply into Soviet society that a reading of the book will serve to dispel many false notions among people in the west. In the Soviet Union, like in North America,

there are a substantial number of people who believe everything their government says, and those who do not believe in the government are reluctant to criticize it because of their patriotism.

But perhaps the most important message in the book is the extent to which the Russian people are comfortable with authoritarianism. It is very difficult, Shipler tells us, to find a dissident in the Soviet Union who is not a great patriot and a believer in authoritarianism. Solzhenitsyn, the most worshipped dissident in the western world, believes in an autocratic theocracy with the Russian Orthodox Church ruling the country. Sakharov, who is liberal politically and an exception, is so patriotic that he was offended when the KGB (secret police) asked him if he planned to defect when travelling in Europe.

Given the present situation in east-west relations, we should be grateful for this book, which provides us with a better understanding of this "secretive super-power".