

Entertainment

Movie Review

Misery certainly loves company

By GARRY J. MURDOCK
Herald Special

There's good news and bad news for writer Paul Sheldon: He's just been saved from certain death in a car wreck in the snowy Colorado Rockies. The bad news: He's been saved by his number one fan, a psychotic recluse who wants to keep him as a pet writer.

And there you have the plot behind Misery, the movie based on Stephen King's novel of the same name.

James Caan plays Paul Sheldon, a man famous for his slew of "Misery" romance novels. Novels he only wrote to pay the bills in hopes of writing more serious work.

Meet Annie Wilkes, played by Kathy Bates, his "number one fan" of the Misery series. She has all of his books in hardcover, has Sheldon's picture over the fireplace and has memorized all there is to know about him; from his birthdate to the one cigarette he smokes after he finishes writing a book.

One may think Annie is nothing more than an over-avid fan, but for Paul Sheldon, who slowly begins to realize that Annie is not going to call for an ambulance but leave him in her guest bedroom with two broken legs. She is much more than that.

Annie Wilkes' passion for Paul Sheldon's books extends beyond that of the man himself. Coupled with the fact we are introduced to her 'scrapbook' - nothing but newspaper clippings of 'accidents' (one which befell her late husband), - we get some insight into what Paul Sheldon is in for.

Nothing short of 'Misery'. The movie is, not surprisingly, different from the book. Nor is it as good.

However, it does have some merits on its own.

In the book we see what Paul Sheldon is going through, both psychologically as well as physically. We see him not only try to rationalize what is happening to him, but why Annie behaves the way she does. James Caan, far from over the hill, does extremely well with what little the role allows him to portray as writer Paul Sheldon.

As the story relies heavily on facial reactions (not vocal responses) to Annie's brutality, Caan has done an admirable job - although perhaps showing a little more fear in certain places might have made the performance more convincing.

One cannot help feel, that with all the close-ups of Paul Sheldon in his reactions to Anne Wilkes, that a narration would have worked extremely well here.

The real surprise here is Kathy Bates, who plays the disturbed Annie perfectly: happy and cheery one moment, angry and downright psychotic the next. One doesn't know when to expect the Jekyll/Hyde transformation to occur. Unfortunately for Paul, the fact he has killed off Misery Chastain (the heroine of the Misery series), a book that Annie is now reading, so that he can end the series and get on to establishing himself as a 'serious' writer, doesn't please her one bit. How much it pleases her is almost too frightening to watch.

Especially if you're Paul Sheldon, a man who is beginning to believe he's about to become a permanent house guest.

Director Rob Reiner (Stand By Me), has created a good movie here, surprisingly adding humor in spots you don't expect. Annie's condition may be psychotic, but her ability to change moods as rapidly as the weather brings

some humor to various situations: One moment she is threatening to blow Paul's brains out with the pistol she just loaded, the next moment she is giddy over the new chapter of the Misery book she is forcing Paul to turn out, so that Misery Chastain can live again.

The true problem with the movie lies in the fact that Reiner hasn't explored the character of Paul Sheldon enough.

Sure we feel sorry for him that his legs are busted and he can hardly move without inflicting greater pain than what he is already suffering. We feel even sorrier for Paul because Annie has decided to keep him and there's nothing he can do about it.

But what is Sheldon thinking? How are we to know (as the book tells us) that he understands why Annie is a recluse, why she has sabotaged her own phone or that he feels the new Misery book she is forcing him to write is truly his best work ever. Sheldon hides the book at the end from Annie, but Reiner never allows us to know what becomes of it.

Two other changes are worth mentioning: the movie, surprisingly, isn't as gruesome as the book. King's books have a tendency to go overboard on the blood and guts part and thankfully Reiner has decided to forego most of the extreme violence that Annie inflicts upon Paul, in both the amount and the actual 'punishments' she gives to him. However, the movie is still extremely painful to watch in a couple of parts, as toned-down as it is.

The other change is to the storyline, which has only one policeman (Richard Farnsworth) who comes looking for Sheldon at Wilkes' house. The result is; the ending has to be changed and it isn't nearly as dramatic as the climax of the book.

Taken on its own, however, the movie is good. It's suspenseful. It's even humorous. Almost anyone could have played Caan's role, but Kathy Baker really deserves a hand for her performance.

Not everyone can play someone who smashes Paul's foot one moment with a sledgehammer and then tells him she 'loves him' the next.

I hope no one ever loves me that much.

Christmas carolfest

Carolfest '90, billed as an evening of Christmas music for the whole family, will be held Dec. 17, 7:30 p.m. at St. John's United Church on Guelph Street in Georgetown.

Local church choirs and the Georgetown Choral Society, as well as a brass quartet, will provide vocal renditions of Christmas favorites, under the direction of Haydn C. Evans,

church organist at St. John's United Church.

Although there is no admission charge, for the performance, donations will be accepted with proceeds from the concert going to the Georgetown food bank.

Rehearsals for the choirs have been scheduled for this coming Monday, at 8 p.m. and Sunday, Dec. 16, 2:30 p.m. at St. John's United Church.

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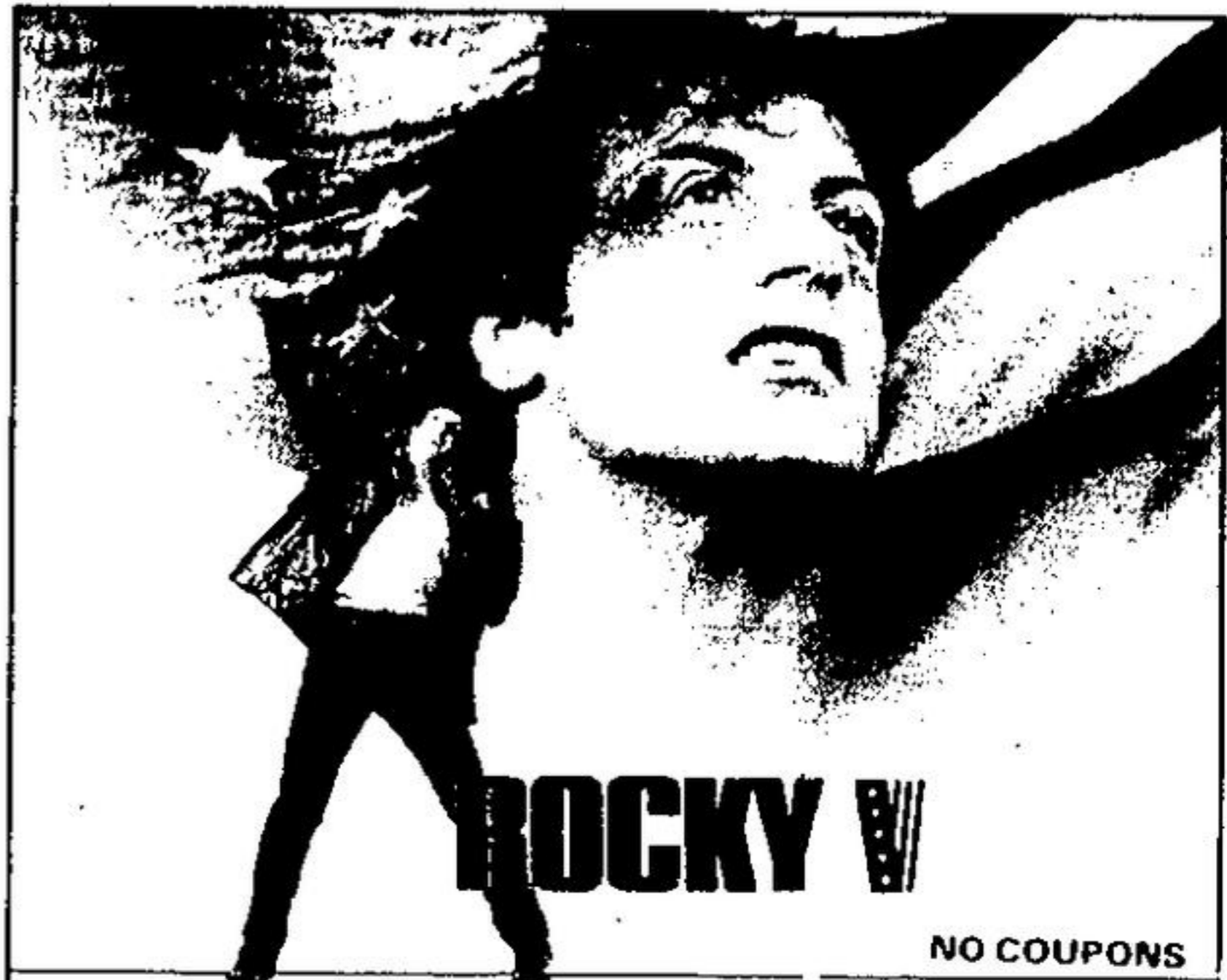
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