Blood on the Snow
What went wrong?

by William Weintraub

Everybody in the industry expected that it would be yet another great Canadian motion picture...

did you learn from Blood?"

"All right," said Goniff. "I'm going to let it all hang out. To start with, the screenplay was brilliant — so powerful and hard-hitting that six Hollywood majors and nine minor studios found it too hot to handle. Thus we were able to obtain a thoroughly professional American script at a very reasonable price. Then I had a quick re-write done locally, so it could be considered as Canadian content. This, of course, is necessary if you want to get certification from those bastards up in Ottawa, for your tax write-off.

"So we had this great script. And we were able to get Melissa Van Splatt and Jerome Spurgeon — two very great stars who brought with them not only their vast Hollywood experience but also their Canadian citizenship, to help with that goddam certification.

"In short, we had a magnificent package, with interim financing cross-collateralized through the exercise of options in the re-capitalization of the production guarantors' parent corporation. As a deal, it was pure poetry." Goniff paused, a dreamy look in his eye.

"So what went wrong?", I asked.

"I'll tell you what went wrong," said the colorful young producer. "That son-of-a-bitch Headley Crowe went wrong, that's what. I made the mistake of a lifetime when I hired that mangy little bugger to direct. I must have been out of my tree! A director? Phooey! That bum couldn't direct his genitalia in a brothel, you should excuse the expression."

Goniff was shaking with rage and sat down slowly in his chair, his hands fisted on the table before him.

"So we had this script. And we were very anxious to get into Samantha's pants. But I think he learned something from that experience."

"You mean you don't know Samantha?" he said, incredulously. "Everybody knows Samantha. She's the receptionist down at our office. She's got the most beautiful body, and the most beautiful voice, and the most beautiful face. And she wants to be a screenwriter. Majored in English in high school.

"I can't believe it," I said. "You mean your receptionist actually wrote the screenplay?"

"Yes, and answered the phone at the same time," said Robitaille. "Mand you Goniff never thought that was important. And of course he was too anxious to get into Samantha's pants. But I think he learned something from Blood, and now of course we've got a full-time Creative Supervisor, in charge of nothing but the development of screenplays."

"I heard about Goniff International's new Creative Supervisor, and I bought him out of the crowd. She was Mrs. Elsie Strudel, a well-versed matronly woman in her 60's.

"Let me congratulate you on your appointment," I said.

"What's to congratulate?" asked Mrs. Strudel. "I wasn't Charlton Goniff's mother-in-law, and if my husband wasn't a major investor, I would never have taken this job. Dealing with writers is not a pleasant task. They
often bearded persons who seldom take
a bath. Frankly, I would rather be home
in my kitchen making gefilte fish. But

"But I believe you are highly qualified
for the job," I said.

"Of course I am," said Mrs. Strudel. "I
always have been crazy about fine lit-

erature. And I have published my own

neurologist. Leafing through it I noticed, among
other items, the proposed budget of the
$7,000,000 film. Appended to this is a
deeply-moving statement by Charlton P.

"Our young industry is being

criticized," he writes, "for a financial
practice vulgarly known as 'siphoning
off the top.' The fees that producers
charge against their budgets for their

own services have been described as
being hideously inflated!" But Goniff
International wishes to assure its in-
v

vestors that all moneys raised for the

production of Zipperville will go right up
to there onto the screen, with no private

pockets being lined along the way.

"I personally am making this great

motion picture as a labor of love, because
I believe so deeply in it. Thus the fee
that I am charging as producer is merely a
token sum. A glance at the budget will
show how laughingly small it is - less
than the salary of the leading lady's
assistant hairdresser." The statement is
accompanied by a photo of Goniff in

which he is shown standing beside his
car. This vehicle, on the advice of his
public relations consultants, is now a
Volkswagen Rabbit, rather than the

usual Ferrari.

Looking up from the prospectus, I

now spied Anthony Purvis, the famous
film professor and critic, and I engaged
him in conversation about the ill-fated
Blood on the Snow.

"I personally haven't seen it yet,"
he said, "but you can be sure of one thing:
if it's having trouble getting into the
theatres it's because it's being sup-

pressed by the American distributors.

As you know, they control every movie
screen in this country. They know that

Canadian films are a threat to the Holly-

wood monopoly. They're afraid, that's
what they are - afraid of greatness,
audaciously inaccessible."

My next interview was with Manfred
Peltz, the dashing gossip columnist who

wields such power in the world of

Montreal show business. Where's the

"Never mind about Blood," he said.
"This new one I'm worried about, this
Zipperville. It's starting out as a disas-

tering film, isn't it?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Just look around you," said Manf-
red at this chintzy party. "Where's the

"One does hear, of course, that Headley's
last four films have been massively hor-

ing, but that's only what you read in the

newspaper. Written by reviewers, not
critics. What these Philistines call in-

coherence is actually Headley's master-

ful interweaving of many layers of am-

biguity. Heaven help the Canadian
cinema if it ever succumbs to the primi-


tive, linear storytelling that epitomizes

Hollywood's slick pandering to audience
pleasure."

"So you don't think Blood is a failure?"

"If it's a failure," said Anthony Purvis,
"it's one of Headley Crowe's noble fail-

ures. For a serious student of the cinema
like myself, intentions are of much

higher significance than mere perfor-

mance. Headley, for instance, always

aims high. Have you ever seen a film-

maker who has suffered so intensely

over the way the multi-nationals have

rejected the solar energy option? And

Headley Crowe is willing to share that

suffering with us, and to make it refresh-

ingly inaccessible."

The industry has learned a great deal
from the mistakes of 1980," he said.
"Nineteen eighty-one will be the year of
the fly-by-nights fall by the way-
side. There will be fewer players left in
the game - producers like myself, true
professionals."

"What would you say was the prin-
cipal lesson you learned in 1980?"

"We learned that writers are every-

thing," said Goff. "Don't skim on them.
For Zipperville I've brought up a
couple of real geniuses from New York,
"It's costing me a mint"

said Purvis.

"Who's talking about the screen-
play?" said Goff. "I was referring to the
government do we? It would be silly to

print such a thing as that."

"Just look at this party, will you? It's
only been going for about two hours and

already the caviar is all gone. I don't

believe there's going to be a sequel to

that office she'd have a heart attack. And

daughter knew half of what goes on in

law and that receptionist?"

"I'm afraid I don't," I said.

"The three essential ingredients are

conflict, jealousy and a good chase near
the end. The main problem with Cana-

dian movies is that they put the chase
too near the beginning. Then there is
nowhere for the story to go, dramatur-

gically speaking.

"What did you think of the screenplay
for Blood on the Snow?" I asked.

"I don't ask," said Mrs. Strudel. "When-
ever I think of that piece of schlock I get

heartburn. But let me ask you a ques-

tion, confidentially. Do you think there's

anything going on between my son-in-

law and that receptionist?"

"So, I don't think so," I said. "I'm sure
it's just a professional relationship."

"It better be," said Mrs. Strudel. "If I

ever see that of piece of schlock I get

heartburn."

"And, giving me a small peck on the

cheek, she put a copy of the

"Everyone, I'm going to laptop this

scene, for the record."

"Oh, anybody want a -e*-

posters?"

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"Sorry, but I'm not a doctor," I said,

"'That doesn't matter," she said, "As

long as you're in a nice, high income

family,"

"And you're putting me on," she said, with

a dazzling smile. "Now we don't want to

pay all those nasty taxes to the nasty old
government. So we'll be sily to do

that, won't we? When an exciting in-

vestment like a movie can give us a 100-

percent write off."

"Honestly," I said. "I'm not an inves-

tor."

"Of course you are," she said. And she

moved very close to me, to whisper in

my ear. "Between you and me," she said,

"I'm a movie world like yourself."

I find it very stimulating to be part of
the industry. Don't forget, you're going
to meet a lot of actresses, and most of
them really are the company of older men.

And giving me a small peck on the
cheek, she put a copy of the

Zipperville prospectus into my trembling

hands and moved on to tackle a nearby