

Lee Thompson's
Happy Birthday to Me

It's a continent-wide 'phenomenon,' if the term can be so employed: the target audience as target. Movie producers are convinced that North American teenagers derive some kind of vicarious thrill from watching their film counterparts kill and dismember one another, and box office returns back them up. Whereas the horror genre was once synonymous with low budgets and small-time, independent producers, it now ranks as one of the industry's most lucrative sectors - an apparent sure bet in a business that runs on risk. Gore has gone legit; it's big time now, replete with expensive ad campaigns, massive budgets and major studio backing.

That all these factors would make an indelible impression on the spanking new Canadian film industry was inevitable. This year, DAL Productions has been kind enough to supply a companion piece to *Prom Night* and *Terror Train*. *Happy Birthday to Me*, which gleefully offers up "six of the most bizarre murders you will ever see," is stock schlock with a footnote: as the latest and potentially most offensive entry in the 'multiple murder for kicks' sweepstakes, the picture is a grotesque little barometer for the state of the 'art' in this country.

Like both its predecessors and at least two yet-to-be-released Canadian films to follow, *Happy Birthday* is another reworking of the 'ten little indians' theme. Virginia (Melissa Sue Anderson) suffers traumatic brain damage in a car accident, undergoes rehabilitation, returns to her home town and college pals, and the kids start dropping like flies. There are red herrings galore, an overabundance of gratuitous gore, and all the wit and grace of an afternoon at the abattoir. Except that no one ever really suffers here; death in this movie is as casual as conversation, devoid of any purpose other than the obvious. And it's working. Kids are forking over \$4.50 apiece to scream and bounce in their seats, even if the whole thing's a massive dose of déjà vu. *Happy Birthday to Me's* script has been shot at least six times over in the last few years under different titles, and the budget's gone up every time. And the more money they spend, it seems, the less imagination they bring to the package. *Happy Birthday* has no tongue in its sallow cheek; as if to justify the expenditure, Canadian horror flicks have lost the crazy edge

they used to have. The scariest thing about all these films is their deadly dullness; the fact that they account for so large a percentage of this country's total product is enough to give you the creeps.

Anne Reiter •

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME. d. J. Lee Thompson line p. Stewart Harding p. John Dunning André Link assoc. p. Lawrence Nesius mus. Bo Harwood & Lance Rubir p. design. Earl Preston d.o.p. Miklos Lente sc. John Saxton, Peter Jobin, Timothy Bond exec. asst. to p. Irene Litinsky p. man. Ginette Hardy unit man. Estelle Lemieux loc. man. Cary Ross p. compt. Leo Gregory p. acct. Lucie Drolet, Trudi Link asst. to line p. Marilyn Majerczyk p. sec. Carole Laflamme a.d./2nd unit d. Charles Braive 2nd a.d. François Ouimet 3rd a.d. Robert Ditchburn casting by Casablanca Productions Inc. extras casting Francine Brasseur cont. Monique Champagne p. sd. mix Richard Lightstone boom op. Jim Thompson, Jean-Claude Matte 2nd unit sd. Susan Schneir cam. op. David Douglas focus Mathieu Décaré 2nd asst. cam. Michel Bernier 2nd unit cam. Ernst Michel, Michael Jones, Don Burgess, Mosh Levine asst. art d. Michel Denuet, Claude Benoit (2nd asst.) set buyer Katherine Wadas asst. set dresser Armand Thomas set props Charles Bernier, Ryal Cosgrove (asst.) property-vehicle co-ord. David Phillips construc. man. André Brochu art d. asst. Jim Hodgson, Mark Montebello, Réal Paré, Brian Campbell cost. design. Huguette Gagné ward. Marie-Hélène Gascon, Elisabeth Lamy, Denys Proulx (asst.) make-up Jocelyne Bellemare, Monique Coge (asst.), Normande Campeau (asst.) hair Bob Pritchett, Benjamin Robin (asst.) key grip Jean-Louis Daoust grips Emmanuel Lépine, Pierre Charpentier, Jacques LeFlaguais, Claude Gingras gaf. Donald Saari beat boy Charles Hughes elec. Gérard Proulx, John Lewin, Jacques Paquet 2nd unit elec. Walter Nichols gen. op. Guy Rémillard, Eddy Trempe sp. efx co-ord. King Hernandez, Bill Doane, Warren Keillor, Ron Ottesen efx tech. Jacques Godbout, Gilles Aird, Louis Craig, France Belisle sp. make-up efx The Burman Studio neurosurgery consultant Dr. Burke Dial stunt co-ord. Max Kleven bridge loc. man. Tim Rabbitt stunt perform. Bennie Dobbins, Brad Bovee, Tony Jefferson, Ben Scott, John Clay Scott, Karen Pike, Dwayne McLean, Jerome Tiberghien, Jean Lysight, Susan Charest, Lyne Fournier, Eve Robin asst. ed. Michael Karen, Jaki Carmody L.A. superv. Peter Thompson sd. ed. Jeff Bushelman, Pat Somerset re-rec. mix. Les Fresholtz C.A.S., Stan Polinsky, Robert Fernandez C.A.S. mus. ed. Kirk Hawkes unit pub. Elizabeth Morris stills Pirooska Mihalka sec. to Mr. Thompson Kathy Flynn craft serv. Gisele Bolduc asst. loc. man. David Bailey transp. capt. Neil Bibby drivers Christopher Gilmore, Sidney Goldberg, Michael Borlace, Edward Sanden, John Ellis, Jim Disensi, Michel Côté, Victoria Frodsham, Marc Hébert p.a. Stuart Woolley, Gregory Dunning, Beverly Lev, Alain Desrosiers p. typists Kathy Wolf, Danae Vilandre L.P. Melissa Sue Anderson, Glenn Ford, Lawrence Dane, Sharon Acker, Frances Hyland, Tracy Bregman, Jack Blum, Matt Craven, Lenore Zann, David Eisner, Lisa Langlois, Michel René Labelle, Richard Rebiere, Lesleh Donaldson, Jerome Tiberghien, Vlasta Vrana, Gina Dick, Walter Massey, Len Watt, Victor Knight, Rollie Nincheri, Keith Sutherland, Joe Wertheimer, Paul Board, Bruce Gooding, Alan Barnett, Marc Desgagné, Aram Barkev, Herbert Vool, Maurice Podbrey, Terry Haig, Louis Del Grande, Nick Kilbertus, Damiir Andrei, Murray Westgate, Earl Pennington, Griffith Brewer, Ron Lea, Alan Katz, Stephanie Miller, Karen Stephen, Steven Mayoff, Nancy Allan, Karen Hynes, Tracey-Marie Langdon, Debbie McGellin, Kathy Reid, Lori Timmons, Debbie Tull, Lynn Wilson animals trained by Mike Klingbell, Catman Productions p.c. The Birthday Film Co. Ltd. (1980) dist. Columbia Pictures running time 110 min.



● Accidentally caught in a mysterious conspiracy, Kate Jackson and Elliott Gould try to escape their pursuers

Alvin Rakoff's
Dirty Tricks

Their blood carbonated with excitement from a modest winning streak (*Atlantic City*, *U.S.A.*, *Improper Channels*), and the discovery of such exciting new Canadian talent as Burt Lancaster and Louis Malle, some members of the Canadian film industry will probably laugh off *Dirty Tricks* as an unlucky roll of the dice. ("Heh, this is a crazy business! Who knows what the public will go for. One year it's kooky camps and high school blood-all-over-the-place, the next year it's arts-shmarts.")

That will be the only laughter surrounding Alvin Rakoff's (*City on Fire*, *Death Ship*, *King Solomon's Treasure*) *Dirty Tricks*, a film comedy that only its publicist could love.

Ostensibly a breezy *Silver Streak*/*Foul Play* suspense comedy (a hybrid genre that François Truffaut has noted begins with the Bond pictures), *D.T.* provides inadvertent comedy when it tries for suspense, and suspense only when the cheeseburger-bloater Elliot Gould courts a heart attack doing wind sprints away from bad guys.

Director Rakoff and writers William Norton, Sr., Eleanor Norton, Thomas Gifford and Camille Gifford clumsily steal ideas and graft scenes from so many other Hollywood films that *D.T.* lurches unsettlingly from style to style like a kidnap ransom note. The film opens with Harvard American history prof Gould and a blonde student doing a harried battle of the sexes routine. We could be in George Segal's next film. Then the film shifts gears as Gould goes to class and makes, in what is arguably the worst scene in this terrible film, a trembling lipped defense of the virtues of long ago America. Frank Capra would blush. Then the suspense angle in-

trudes. A student of Gould's discovers a letter that suggests George Washington was on the take from the British. Then bald twins in muscle shirts karate the student to death. Then a handsome man and a beautiful woman (spys, of course), chase the baldies. Then, Kate Jackson, imitating Jane Fonda as a pesky, new-woman reporter, chases Gould. Then the baldies chase Rich Little, who as hero Gould's sidekick, appears to be impersonating Gig Young. At one point or another in the film, everyone is in hot pursuit of everyone else.

Also thrown in at odd moments in the film, are: one cute dog; one post-Watergate morality play involving a corrupt official; one cruel ageism joke; one fag joke, three pee-pee jokes; and... a Canadian director's best friend - lots and lots of close-ups of American taxi cabs in an attempt to persuade the film's viewers into thinking this is an American film. Here's the hoping.

Stephen Cole •

DIRTY TRICKS. d. Alvin Rakoff exec. p. Pierre David, Victor Solnicki, Arnold Kopelson p. Claude Héroux sc. Thomas Gifford, Camille Gifford, Eleanor Norton, William Norton, sr. based on the novel "The Glendower Legacy" by Thomas Gifford d.o.p. Richard Ciupka p. man. Jean-Marie Loutrel ed. Alan Collins art d. Earl Preston mus. Hagood Hardy cost. Blanche Boileau sd. Patrick Rousseau asst. to p. Kim Obrist a.d. Jim Kaufman (1st), François Ouimet (2nd), Anne Murphy (3rd) unit man. Suzanne Hénaut, Bill Lee (asst.), Michael Bennett (Boston) cont. France Lachapelle loc. man. Harry Sutherland asst. art d. Claude Benoit set dresser Gilles Aird graphics Patricia Dumais props Charles Bernier, Jacques Godbout make-up Jocelyne Bellemare, Stephan Dupuis (sp. efx) hair Pierre David op. David Harrington cam. asst. Andy Chmura (1st), Larry Lynn (2nd) gaf. John Berrie elec. Walter Klymkiv, Michel-Paul Belisle key grip Jacob Rolling grip Paul Morin dolly grip Normand guy boom Normand Mercier stunt co-ord. Bob Minor stills Attila Dory casting Arden Rysphan p. sec. Carole Laflamme L.P. Elliott Gould, Kate Jackson, Arthur Hill, Rich Little, Nick Campbell, Angus McInnes, Michael Kirby, Michael McNamara, Martin McNamara, John Juliani, Alberta Watson, Mavor Moore, Cindy Girling, Sean Sullivan, Neil Affleck, Lee Murray, Earl Pennington, Helen Hughes, Dr. Robert D. Koby, Griff Brewer, Tony Sherwood, Kate Trotter, Irene Kesser, Howard, the dog p.c. A Filmplan International Production (1979), an Avco Embassy release dist. New World Mutual Pictures (Canada) running time 96min.

● Sweetness and light turns to murder and mayhem for *Birthday's* Melissa Sue Anderson and Tracy Bregman photo: Pirooska Mihalka



Eric Till's

Wild Horse Hank

Every so often, usually when censorship controversies arise, there are complaints that few of the films in release are suitable for children. *Wild Horse Hank*, one would think, would find a ready audience if these complaints were accurate, since the film contains no sex and little violence. But, aside from one rather dismal week in Calgary last summer, this 1979 production has not seen the light of day. Bill Marshall's hopes to follow up the success of *Outrageous* with another sleeper were dashed, and it had little to do with either Eric Till's direction (competent), Richard Leiterman's photography (very good), Paul Hoffer's music (hummable), or the acting of the cast (workman-like).

The story is based on Mel Ellis' children's novel *The Wild Horse Killers*, and centres on a Montana rancher's daughter, who has returned home after her first semester at University. Her name is Henrietta Bradford (Linda Blair), but she is known by all and sundry as Hank. One day, while searching for a runaway horse, she discovers a herd of wild horses, who have been captured and are about to be sent off to be slaughtered for pet food. After a violent confrontation with Jay Connors (Al Waxman), the leader of the hunters, Hank determines to save the horses by driving them overland to a federal reservation. Despite her father's objections, and harassment from Connors and his men, that is just what she does.

It is quite evident, very early on, what is wrong with the film. Ellis told a simple, conservationist story, basically the type of quasi-mystical communion between teenage girls and horses that is an old reliable staple of juvenile fiction. Scriptwriter James Lee Barrett has tried to pad this out into a marketable action film. Barrett's two-fisted style - his output includes *The Green Berets* and *Smokey and the Bandit* - is hardly the best choice for this tale. His attempts to provide some comic relief to Hank's journey breaks the mood of the picture more than once. For Ellis, the wild horse killers were shadowy, undefined, malevolent characters, unseen figures in planes and jeeps. Barrett makes Jay Connors a beer-drinking slug, with a nagging wife and a pewling two-year-old son. Making a break from the amiable *King of Kensington*, Al Waxman cuts into the role with relish and tries to give Jay a bit of depth, but he can't hide the fact that what has been written is a superfluous nothing. As Jay's younger brother who takes Hank's side, Michael Wintonick is even more lost. And the CB radio angle at the film's climax is merely an example of a fad which has passed its time.

The key to whatever hopes *Wild Horse Hank* has rests on Linda Blair's performance in the title role. She has the advantage of being a capable rider, and she was interested in the project from the beginning, since she had read Ellis' book while making *The Heretic*. After the disaster of that film (though contrary to general belief, John Boorman's mystical apocalypse did make money), Blair at eighteen needed a role like this to break out of the victim image she had been saddled with since *The*

Exorcist and *Born Innocent*. But her luck still seems to be running low. Except for the riding, the role of Hank gives her very little to do. Though she has won a certain notoriety by her drug busts, Blair lacks the connections of Tatum O'Neal, or the air of intelligence of Kristy McNichol and Jodie Foster. Given her curls, chipmunk cheeks and buxom body, she is pretty enough, but in an opposite way to the lean and hungry look popularized by Brooke Shields.

Worse films than *Wild Horse Hank* have been sold, both here and abroad. What finally hamstrung Bill Marshall in his attempts to sell it was a combination of factors. He should have realized that padding the script was a mistake; it would have made a better sixty-minute television production. But it was not the producer's fault that, after the failure of *International Velvet*, stories about teenage girls and horses were an anathema in Hollywood. That, of course, is a commentary on Marshall, but needs no more belaboring. Mordecai Richler has done it well enough.

In the end, *Wild Horse Hank* fails because, like *Kelly*, and any number of other supposed family films, it ignores the necessity of having a good script. *The Black Stallion* has proven that with good writing a film can work without sex and violence. But the absence of sex and violence by itself is no recommendation.

Paul Costabile •

WILD HORSE HANK. d. Eric Till p. Henk Van der Kolk, William Marshall exec. p. Gerald Leider, Daniel Wilson assoc. p/p. man. Les Kimber a.d. Bob Malenfant, Paul Tucker, Rick Drew d. (2nd unit) Max Kleven sc. James Lee Barrett, from the novel "The Wild Horse Killers," by Mel Ellis d.o.p. Richard Leiterman, C.S.C., Keith Woods (2nd unit) cam. op. Cam MacDonald, Don Burgess cont. Diane Parsons, Cathy Brock ed. George Appleby, C.F.E. asst. ed. John Schofield sd. Christopher Large boom Andrew Wilson sd. ed. Brian French, Michael Clark p. design. Trevor Williams art d. Gerry Holmes, Karen Bromley mus. Paul Hoffer make-up Jamie Brown ward. Ilse Richter sp. efx Mel Merrells props Barry Merrells, Bruce Hosick elec. Brian Hawkes, Dale Larson gaf. Malcolm Kendall grip Frank Merrells key wrangler/horse trainer John Scott stunts Wendy Allen, Cathy Brock, Twylla McLean re-rec. Terry Cooke casting Canadian Casting Associates Lp. Linda Blair, Richard Crenna, Albert Waxman, Michael Wincott, Helen Hughes, Stephen E. Miller, Richard Fitzpatrick, Michael J. Reynolds, James D. Morris, Barbara Gordon, Vaughn Webb, Les Carlson, Gary Reineke, Dale Wilson, Kay Grieve, William Ormond Mitchell p.c. Film Consortium of Canada Inc. (1979) col. 35mm dist. Roke Distributors of Calgary running time 90 min.

Tibor Takacs' *The Tomorrow Man*

"We've been trying to get this series into production for years. One of the stumbling blocks we've had to overcome has been people's perception of science fiction itself. A lot of them expect laser beams and naked girls, and that, to me, is not science fiction but sheer nonsense." (Stephen Zoller, *Starburst* magazine)

"Someone must have traduced Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong, he was arrested one fine morning." (The Trial, by Franz Kafka)

In 1915, Franz Kafka composed the first draft of his literary masterpiece, *The Trial*, a tale of young Joseph K. and his

inability to fight the ever-tightening grip of a society gone mad. K. awakens one morning to find himself arrested on an unknown charge and for a crime he is certain he did not commit. His subsequent battle against the authorities to gain his freedom is futile. Sixty-six years later, this theme of the loss of personal power to an omnipotent system intent on total control is still frequently imitated, to great success, with the most recent example being *The Tomorrow Man*, a new Canadian science fiction thriller.

Borrowing its themes from both Kafka's *The Trial* and the British TV series *The Prisoner*, *The Tomorrow Man* is a first-rate vision of a world on the brink of madness, and the pilot film for a proposed science fiction series from Norfolk Communications and Mega-Media Productions. Called *Through the Eyes of Tomorrow*, this series is the brainchild of talented writing-directing team Stephen Zoller and Tibor Takacs, creators of the controversial feature, *Metal Messiah*.

Written by Stephen Zoller and Peter Chapman, from a story by Zoller, the film focuses on Tom Weston (Stephen Markle), a typical suburbanite with a beautiful wife (Michelle Chicoine), a secure career as a statistical analyst with General Research, and two cars in the garage. He's happy until the day he's singled out by the New Regime, a governmental cult organization devoted to world domination, for re-organizing. Weston is arrested and taken for interrogation to the Regime's hellish prison complex.

The prison is presided over by the warden (Don Francks), a sadistic manipulator of fear and torture, who demands information the man doesn't have. When his questioning proves a failure, the warden resorts to punishments, both physical and mental. Weston is assigned a cell and a number: 9-8-4. The man who had once worked so happily with numbers has become one himself.

As the years pass and the sadistic cat-and-mouse game between the warden and his captive continues, Weston begins to question his own innocence, and at the end of ten years of imprisonment, he decides he's tired of the game and attempts an escape from the heavily fortified complex...

Much of this film's strength can be attributed to the fine work of its actors, most notably Steven Markle (*Side Streets*) as the tormented Weston, and Don Francks (*Drying Up the Streets, My Bloody Valentine* and CBC's *The Phoenix Team*) as the sadistic warden. Both men bring a great deal of depth and power to their roles. Director Takacs and writer Zoller have used the two major characters to great advantage in their attempt at chronicling their future history of a dying planet. The superb

acting, combined with an intelligent script and some fine direction on the part of Takacs, have created a top-notch production. It's no small wonder this film was voted Best Drama Of The Year at the 1980 Canadian Film and Television Association Awards.

As well, *The Tomorrow Man* is full of nightmarish sequences and startling imagery, including one remarkable scene in which Weston, after escaping from his cell and running blindly down a dark maze of endless tunnels and passageways, comes to a stairway he thinks is the way to freedom, only to find the skeletal remains of a fellow escapee lying there, the leering face of the dead man mocking his own attempt at escape. Dream-like images abound here, and much of this is accomplished through the constant use of flashbacks, both to Weston's previous happy life and to the events leading up to his arrest and imprisonment. It is similar in atmosphere to Kafka's *The Trial*, and contains that same dream-like quality inherent in the classic work. It isn't long before both Weston and the viewer are easily caught up in the bizarre game of human chess the warden has created.

The visuals in this picture are also first-rate, with a predominance of bright colours filling the screen. Takacs has used his sets and his visuals to great advantage, even going so far as to converting the Toronto Water Works tunnel system into his prison maze in the final section of the picture.

Kafka would have been proud of *The Tomorrow Man*, for it deals with social and philosophical issues that may face society in the future on an intellectual level, rather than as action-adventure fare for budding Luke Skywalker. As Zoller has stated, there are no laser beams or naked women in this picture. Instead, we're offered a first-rate script, some fine acting and truly superlative visual effects that are a nice change from the gun battles and exploding planetoids of such recent epics as *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Black Hole*. And all on a budget of only \$150,000. That's quite an achievement. But then again, *The Tomorrow Man* is quite a film.

Lloyd Wasser •

THE TOMORROW MAN. d. Tibor Takacs p. William Macadam exec. p. Don Jean-Louis sc. Stephen Zoller, Peter Chapman d.o.p. Alar Kivilo assoc. p. John Gundy a.d. Mark Krawczynski asst. to p. Walter Woloszczuk ed. Tibor Takacs boom Barry Gilmore make-up Nikko p. asst. Deborah Meldazy (1st), Mike Krawczynski (2nd), Billy Heintz (3rd) hair Rick Christian Zelwacz cost. Helen Dagworthy sp. efx Peter St. Amour, Jeff Bertram, Phil Stevens grips Anna Bourque, Doug Earl, Mike Rea gaffers Dave Simon, Warren Fisher wardrobe Jane Reynolds stills Pattie Meade Lp. Stephen Markle, Don Francks, David Clement, Stan Wilson, Gail Dahms, Michelle Chicoine p.c. Mega-Media Communications Corp. (1979) col. 16mm dist. (Cda) Norfolk Communications running time (2 versions) 56 min., 76 min.

It's man versus machine as a robot keeper's shadow falls over a terrified Tom Weston (Stephen Markle)

