

Implausibility, incompetence merge on film

By Judith Trojan
Catholic News Service

"Criminal Law" (Hemdale) is a muddled crime thriller that promises much but delivers nothing except offbeat casting.

When cocky young defense lawyer Ben Chase (Gary Oldman) wins the acquittal of accused murderer-rapist Martin Thiel (Kevin Bacon) with some show-biz courtroom tactics, Thiel is set free to kill again. Somehow in his zeal to win the case, Chase ignored the obvious fact that his wealthy client was indeed a psychopath. Consistency was never Chase's strong point.

In one of several dumb sequences in this implausible film written by Mark Kasdan and directed by Martin Campbell, Chase is compelled to meet Thiel in a park in the middle of the night in the rain. Chase stumbles over Thiel's latest female victim, naked, bludgeoned and smoldering from a blowtorch wound to her torso.

This trauma spurs a farfetched cat-and-mouse game between client and lawyer, in which each attempts to trap the other. Since he put Thiel back on the street, guilt-ridden Chase decides to snare the psycho even if he has to destroy himself and compromise his law firm in the bargain. In a series of incomprehensible scenes, Chase manages to incite the young man into more despicable acts while uncovering the catalyst for Thiel's madness.

Thiel's icy mom (Elizabeth Sheppard) practices obstetrics and gynecology in the family mansion. Her specialty is abortions. Almost aborted himself, Martin Thiel takes his role of anti-abortion avenger a tad too far.

"Criminal Law" is neither a pro- nor anti-abortion film, nor is it credible on a legal or technical level. It offers no resolutions to Chase's personal struggles with morality, guilt and innocence, client rights and the legal justice system in general. Intriguing plot lines are introduced and promptly dropped, artsy atmosphere obliterates one's grasp of who's who, what's what and where the story actually takes place. Since it rains too much, it could be somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, but, in fact, the film was filmed in Montreal as a double for

Boston.

Due to a few grisly shots of corpses, some violence, much menace and a rough sex scene, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'Pet Sematary'

The latest incarnation of a Stephen King best seller, "Pet Sematary" (Paramount) has all the ingredients of a chilling ghost story. Unfortunately, the potential in King's own cinematic adaptation of the novel is diminished by inferior casting, run-of-the-mill horror shtick and a grisly slice 'n' dice finale that leaves nothing to the imagination.

When young university physician Louis Creed (Dale Midkiff), his wife, Rachel (Denise Crosby), and two small children, Ellie and Gage, relocate to rural Maine, their choice in housing is a tad unwise. Fronted by a highway frequented by huge speeding trucks and bordered to the rear by an old cemetery set up for children's pets that have been squashed on the road, the house is not exactly a safe haven for a family with a toddler and a beloved pet cat.

Just behind the pet cemetery lies another, less benign burial ground that offers its residents a second go-round. Even the Indians who first used this sick soil decided to quit the place once they met their horribly recycled loved ones.

As helmed by rock-video director Mary Lambert and scripted by King, the film takes the easy way out and resorts to graphic touches that even show a toddler turning into a gruesome family slasher.

Relevant questions about the finality of death — aptly raised by 6-year-old Ellie (Blaze Berdahl) and mistakenly challenged by Louis — promise more depth to this otherwise contrived story. Fred Gwynne as Jud, a lifetime local and cemetery tour guide, adds a welcome touch of beneficent menace, but his character never really lives up to its promise.

Two other characters — neither clearly developed — are a helpful ghost who warns Louis not to mess around in the Indian cemetery and a local washerwoman who



Kevin Bacon (left) is the defendant and Gary Oldman is his attorney in "Criminal Law." The U.S. Catholic Conference describes the film as "a muddled crime thriller."

commits suicide because her stomach hurts.

suggest that he's slitting throats — is inexcusable.

"Pet Sematary" has none of the inspiration of such chilling ghost and horror shows as "The Shining" or "Carrie," both of which were based on King novels. Peppered with loose ends and gratuitous climactic gore, "Pet Sematary" is a disappointment. And despite the fact that the final credits announce that no animals were mistreated during the filming, one wonders why King or Lambert couldn't have come up with a less graphic way of suggesting Gage's afterlife transformation into a killing machine. To exploit a child actor in this manner — even by using clever editing to

Parents should keep children away from this film at all costs, especially when it arrives on video shelves. "Pet Sematary" may inspire a relevant parent-child discussion about dealing with grief over the deaths of pets and loved ones, but it also may incite or frighten children when they see how easy and seemingly fun it can be to slash family members.

Due to an explicit and gratuitous suicide by hanging and a graphic climactic bloodbath inflicted by a toddler on his family, the USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.



A sign of CHRIST'S LOVE

Father Eugene serves a people scattered throughout numerous villages in his native Burma. For days he criss-crosses the delta in a small boat, visiting Christian families and bringing them Sacraments -- a living witness of Christ's love to his people.

Won't you help support a seminarian in the Missions so that one day he may give as powerful a witness to Christ's love as Father Eugene does day after day? Contribute to the Society of St. Peter Apostle for the support of mission vocations.



Photo: MISSIO



The Society for the Propagation of the Faith
The Society of St. Peter Apostle
...supporting mission vocations for 100 years
Fr. Robert C. Bradler
1150 Buffalo Rd., Dept. C
Rochester, NY 14624

Yes! I want to help educate a seminarian in the Missions.
Enclosed is my sacrifice of:

- \$700 for one full year \$350 for half-year
 \$_____ for two or more years
 \$100 \$50 \$25 \$10 Other \$_____

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Your gift is tax deductible!

#344 6/15/89



Outdoor Patio Time Is Here...

We have an outstanding selection of patio bricks in many shades. Stop in and see our complete display. Landscaping bricks starting at 23¢.

• Stone Chips • Brick Chips • and we now stock:

PAVESTONE PLUS™ WECKESSER BRICK

Complete Line of Masonry Materials
For The Do-It-Yourselfer

450 Trabold Rd., Gates

247-1100

Hours: Mon. - Fri. 8:00-5:00

Thurs. 8:00-8:00

NOW OPEN SAT. 9:00-12:00

Serving the Rochester Area
for over 50 years