

IN REVIEW
FEATURE

'Gun' sequel amuses; 'Jack' lacks substance

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Naked Gun 33 1/3: The Final Insult'

(Paramount) Despite the misgivings of his bride (Priscilla Presley), a retired cop (Leslie Nielsen) goes undercover, befriendng a terrorist (Fred Ward) intent on bombing the Academy Awards ceremony. Director Peter Segal's unpretentious, cheerfully nutty sequel continues the madcap misadventures of the loony lieutenant with fast-paced pratfalls, merry mixups and silly sight gags that poke fun at famous scenes from other movies. Violence played for laughs, some irreverent humor and double entendres as well as several instances of profanity. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'Lightning Jack'

(Savoy) Failed Western comedy teams a vain bank robber (Paul Hogan) with an inept, mute assistant (Cuba Gooding Jr.) as they attempt to score one successful holdup. With Hogan's cliché-ridden script, director Simon Wincer turns



Paramount Pictures
Lt. Frank Drebin (Leslie Nielsen) takes his wife, Jane Spencer-Drebin (Priscilla Presley), hostage while attempting to thwart a terrorist plot in *Naked Gun 33 1/3: The Final Insult*.

in a dull, sometimes crude oater in which the tumbleweeds have more substance than the characters. Implied affairs, sympathetic portrayal of outlaws and a few shootouts. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'The Paper'

(Universal) City news editor (Michael Keaton) of a New York tabloid battles the managing editor (Glenn Close) over the front-page coverage of a racially charged murder while struggling with the wishes of his very pregnant, neglected wife (Marisa Tomei) to take a less demanding job offered by an arrogant competitor (Spalding Gray). Director Ron Howard's ensemble comedy-drama conveys the frantic pressures of one fractious day in a big-city newsroom, but its stressed-out characters are too sketchily drawn to involve viewers in their assorted personal crises. Brief violence, some adulterous innuendo and frequent rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'Raining Stones'

(Northern Arts) Gritty British social drama about an unemployed worker (Bruce Jones) who's determined to buy his daughter a first Communion dress but, unable to find enough odd jobs to pay for it, borrows the money from a loan shark who terrorizes his family when he can't repay it. Director Ken Loach explores working-class life in semi-documentary fashion, finding universal appeal in the story of a good but muddled family man whose struggles to find work are often humorous, though they have serious consequences reflecting the need for social justice. Passing sexual references, occasional profanity and assorted rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America.

Religion played role in communism's fall

Candles Behind the Wall: Heroes of the Peaceful Revolution That Shattered Communism, by Barbara Von Der Heydt; Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1993); 266 pp.; \$19.99.

Reviewed by Charles Desnoyers
Catholic News Service

The fall of communism in Europe since 1989 is arguably the most momentous event of the 20th century. However, the swiftness and completeness of this collapse has, generally speaking, perplexed the so-called experts, precious few of whom saw it coming.

With admirable hindsight, legions of policy analysts, social scientists and historians have offered up well-reasoned accounts, citing such causes as the long-term structural defects of a socialist economy, the inability of the Soviet empire to provide guns and butter in a renewed SDI-driven arms race with the United States, and a revolution of rising political expectations growing out of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

Surprisingly, given the stunning vigor with which the ancient religious traditions of the area have reasserted themselves, relatively little weight has been given to the role of religious dissent as a moral counterbalance to the Marxist state. The exception, of course, is Poland, where the direct connection to the papacy and the church's central role in the Solidarity labor movement had, by 1989, already created a shadow government.

However, as Barbara Von Der Heydt tells us in her richly sourced oral history, *Candles Behind the Wall*, this was only



the tip of the iceberg. In fact, she asserts in a manner bound to rankle the majority of more secularly oriented experts, it was the power of religion as a genuine alternative to the utilitarian moral rootlessness of Marxism-Leninism that was the decisive factor:

"The reason that communism collapsed is that Marxism is based on the false premise that the nature of man is inherently good and perfectible through human endeavor, that it is a product of his material surroundings, devoid of transcendence. But faith without transcendence often produces tyranny," she writes.

Regardless of whether one finds this line of argument convincing, Von Der Heydt's portraits are unforgettable. Culled from more than 100 interviews with religious dissidents, secret organizers and prison proselytizers, the capsule biographies and first-person accounts make compelling reading. From a border guard at the Berlin Wall who refuses to shoot and ultimately becomes active in his church — despite repeated trips to prison — to a frail Orthodox intellectual who wins the allegiance of his cellmates when cigarettes miraculously

appear while he prays, we can only marvel at the stubborn courage of their everyday lives.

They deserve a wider audience than they are likely to get, for reasons that make this book less satisfying as a work of history than it might otherwise have been. As an active Christian, Von Der Heydt makes it very clear that this book is an act of witness, and as such she makes no attempt to disguise her point of view. This, unfortunately, is likely to limit the book's appeal in some circles, as will her connections to the Heritage Foundation and the Reagan administration.

Moreover, there is an uncomfortably close connection (for me at least) between the most heavily cited authors and the ringing endorsements on the book's dust jacket. Finally, as a student of modern Chinese history I find it surprising to see almost no mention of the demonstrations and massacre at Tiananmen Square — generally considered to be a foreshadowing of the collapse of European communism in the months following.

Still, though Von Der Heydt's thesis may not be sufficient, one cannot quibble at her reportage. Anyone concerned with the role of religion in the modern world should be moved by her portraits.

Desnoyers teaches global history and is director of Asian Studies at La Salle University in Philadelphia.

Available at your bookstore or order prepaid from Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 255 Jefferson Avenue S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich. 49503. Add \$2 for shipping and handling.

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