

Body Heat (1981) Kasdan

P Michell, 2020

Ned Racine is a seedy small town lawyer in Florida. During a searing heatwave he's picked up by married Matty Walker. A passionate affair commences but it isn't long before they realise the only thing standing in their way is Matty's rich husband Edmund. A plot hatches to kill him but will they pull it off? Written by Col Needham <col@imdb.com>

Writer-director [Lawrence Kasdan](#) "wanted this film to have the intricate structure of a dream, the density of a good novel, and the texture of recognizable people in extraordinary circumstances".

One of the film's main movie posters featured a long text preamble that read: "It's a hot summer. Ned Racine is waiting for something special to happen. And when it does . . . He won't be ready for the consequences. BODY HEAT. As the temperature rises, the suspense begins".

Lawrence Kasdan – Director (12 films) / Writer (26 films)

His first directorial feature.

Kurosawa trivia: A fan of the films of [Akira Kurosawa](#), something that can be seen in his early scripts. [The Bodyguard](#) (1992) was his first script, and was named after the English title of [Yojimbo](#) (1961), which is also featured in the film itself. [Kevin Costner](#)'s role was originally written for [Steve McQueen](#), who appeared in [The Magnificent Seven](#) (1960), a remake of [Seven Samurai](#) (1954). The characters of R2-D2 and C-3PO, in [Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back](#) (1980) and [Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi](#) (1983), were based on Matashichi and Tahei, two farmers from [The Hidden Fortress](#) (1958).

His Quotes:

You can tell any story in a Western. How can you not be fascinated by them?

Being a writer is like having homework every night for the rest of your life.

I make the kind of pictures I like to see. As it so happens, they're the kind no one else is doing.

Link:

<https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/article/five-favorite-films-with-lawrence-kasdan/>

[See Neo-Noir below for more details on other artists ...](#)

Trivia ... only in Hollywoodland

The picture was shot in freezing cold temperatures. The production had to simulate the heatwave of the film's story, the actors having to act hot in cold conditions. For example, the thespians had to suck ice cubes before speaking to eliminate foggy breath and had water sprayed on their skin and shirts to simulate body sweat.

[William Hurt](#) and [Kathleen Turner](#) wanted the crew to feel comfortable filming their love scenes, so they lined up the crew and both actors introduced themselves to each crew member. When they did this, both stars were naked.

The Matty Walker character was modeled on film noir legend [Lauren Bacall](#). [Kathleen Turner](#) was cast in the role due to her similarities to Bacall, including a distinctive husky voice and distinguishable long, shapely legs.

[Lawrence Kasdan](#) was unaware for many years that [George Lucas](#), for whom he had worked as a writer on [Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back](#) (1980) and [Raiders of the Lost Ark](#) (1981), acted as a guarantor to Ladd Company studio head [Alan Ladd Jr.](#), offering his fee as a guarantee if Kasdan happened to go over budget, thereby covering any overages.

This movie was originally slated to be shot in the New York/New Jersey area. It was moved to Florida because of a Teamsters strike. When the script was changed to Florida, the technical director failed to switch to Florida laws.

Favorite film noir movies of the picture's writer-director [Lawrence Kasdan](#) included [Double Indemnity](#) (1944), [The Asphalt Jungle](#) (1950) and [Out of the Past](#) (1947).

Reviews

Neo-Noir by Harald the Swede

noiroftheweek.com

Introduction

I've been wanting to write about *Body Heat* for some time. I love it to death, yet feel it's often somewhat forgotten next to *Chinatown*, *The Last Seduction*, *The Hot Spot*, *Farewell My Lovely*, and other neo-noirs.

A common opinion seems to be that it's merely a poor copy of film noir in general, and *Double Indemnity* in particular. Well, I beg to differ. *Body Heat* qualifies as my favorite neo-noir, no contest. In fact if I were to create a list of my favorite 20 movies of all time, I wouldn't be surprised to see *Body Heat* make the list. That's how much I like it. Now for the 10 million dollar question: why? This is especially interesting for me since I regard *Double Indemnity* my favorite noir.

The short answer is I feel *Body Heat* is the perfect neo. It takes almost all the classic noir elements, and puts them in a modern world. Without making it feel contrived, staged or unnatural.

Cast

Body Heat is written and directed by [Lawrence Kasdan](#), perhaps most famous for writing the screenplay to *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Return of the Jedi*, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. His biggest success in the director's chair is probably the [Kevin Costner](#) feature *Wyatt Earp*. Unlike with Wyatt Earp Lawrence insisted on casting relatively unknown actors for *Body Heat*, and when [Alan Ladd Jr](#) left [20th Century Fox](#) to form his own company Lawrence finally got his way.

The movie stars [Kathleen Turner](#) (Matty Walker) in her first movie as a stunning *femme fatale*. An impressive debut to say the least. With her is [William Hurt](#) in his second or third movie. He plays the dim-witted, corruptible and horny male protagonist and lawyer Ned Racine, who gets enthralled by Matty. He delivers a very good performance as well. For backup they have great actors like [Richard Crenna](#) (Edmund Walker), [Ted Danson](#) (Peter Lowenstein) and [Mickey Rourke](#) (Teddy Lewis).

The cinematography is done by [Richard H. Kline](#), who also did *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, *Soylent Green*, and *The Boston Strangler* among others. He is the son of [Benjamin H. Kline](#), who worked as cinematographer on an impressive amount of movies, including *Whirlpool*, *Ulmer's Detour*, and the recently discussed *Club Havana*.

The wonderful music in *Body Heat* comes courtesy of famed composer [John Barry](#). The jazzy tunes are tense, sensual and beautiful. In fact I'd argue his music in *Body Heat* is at least as good as his James Bond and *The Persuaders* themes. And the tunes fit perfectly with the rest of the movie.

The movie, and long answer. SPOILERS BELOW!

Let me start with one thing *Body Heat* actually does better than *Double Indemnity*. Unlike with Walter we know from the very beginning that Ned Racine is a no-good man. In the first scene he looks out the window onto a burning building down below and remarks "probably one of my clients", referring to the one deciding to demolish the building where Ned used to eat with his family 25 years ago. This tells us that he is clearly a man of loose moral standards. It is also enforced throughout the entire movie. Whenever he goes out running, he always finishes with a smoke. We learn of a malpractice suite filed against him. As he passes a boy smoking a joint in a public bathroom he looks at him almost with approval. The list goes on and on.

Not only is he a man of loose moral standards, he is a loser as well. As he first meets Matty she tells him "You're not very smart, are you? I like that in a man." This he doesn't even comment upon. No retort, no witty comeback. He takes it, just like a man who isn't very smart. Other small details also let us know that Ned is a loser, like when he tries to throw his hat at the coat hanger, but fails to make it stick.

What all this means is that when the familiar plot twist comes and Ned suggests they murder Matty's husband in order for them to be together, it is completely believable. Something that can't quite be said for *Double Indemnity*.

There are also several hints that this won't go as it's supposed to. Perhaps most obvious is the scene where Ned stares at a car slowly making its way down the street. In it sits a sad clown. A perfect image of things to come. Another scene has Matty, her husband (Edmund, played by Richard Crenna), and Ned sitting at a restaurant. Edmund notices Matty playing with Ned's lighter. Later as Matty goes to freshen up Edmund tells Ned that he'd probably kill any man who steals Matty from him.

Yet another warning comes from Mickey Rourke who has a small role as a criminal and explosives expert. As Ned has Mickey show him how to make a bomb Mickey gives fair warning, citing something Ned once told him. "Anytime you try a decent crime you've got fifty ways you can f**k up. If you figure twenty five of them then you're a genius, and you ain't no genius." At this point Ned is determined to proceed with the murder though. He has made up his mind, and is in it all the way to the end.

An interesting twist in *Body Heat* compared to *Double Indemnity* is that instead of planning the murder to receive twice the insurance money, Matty suggests they change the will in order for her to receive all of her husband's fortune. In the current will she only receives half of it. Ned won't have it though, as he thinks it's too risky. In fact when it comes to murder he is as careful as Walter Neff was.

Something I like about *Double Indemnity*, and many other noirs, is the sexual tension. Tension that is achieved by very small means. A look can tell more than a thousand words. Nowadays there is usually only sexuality, no tension. Something often seems lost in the transition to more graphic and vocal sexuality, and there is lots of it *Body Heat* (steamy but tasteful, if you ask me). Yet they still manage to achieve a tension similar to what you find in classic films noir.

One tense scene has Ned on the porch and Matty on the inside testing him, waiting for him to make his move. Ned decides to kick in a glass door in order to quite frankly go hump. This reminds me of something Chandler once wrote: "It was a blonde. A blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window."

The cinematography in *Body Heat* is really good. While many scenes take place in broad daylight, there are also several scenes at night and/or in fog. We also get a few good examples of low key, high contrast lighting. Perhaps the best scene is when Matty is about to go up to the boat house. Standing about 20 meters away she is completely lit, while everything around her is pitch black. Very effective.

The movie also uses extreme heat to create a noir atmosphere. This has been used in other movies, but *Body Heat* might be the first one to actively use it in a neo-noir (earlier examples welcome). Again I feel this is a modern way of making movies, that still evokes a feeling very similar to classic films noir. Instead of having people in soaked trench-coats we have lightly dressed or even naked people wet from sweat. And the water is important. Being wet somehow strips you to the bone. It washes away your make-up, real or projected. It also gives the feeling of a hostile environment, just like heavy rain

can do. It is also worth noting that extreme heat was commonly used in hard-boiled fiction, like in Chandler's novels. And perhaps most importantly for *Body Heat*, it fits perfectly with the visual sexuality. The air breathes sex, deadly sex.

Not only the environment is hostile. The inhabitants are usually hungry either for money, for power or for sex. It is done in a more subtle way than most classic films noir though. At first glance people might seem like regular Joes, but look deeper and darker sides are revealed. Even Ted Danson who has a role somewhat similar to Keyes in *DI* isn't completely clean. He is willing to let a guilty man walk, and is as hungry for sex as everyone else. Ned's other pal and colleague Oscar Grace (played by J.A. Preston) balances Ted out however, by having a stronger urge to always do what is right.

Another example of expert film making is the scene where Ned receives his Fedora. It puts a twist on the classic concept of duality. Ned wants to see how he looks in the Fedora, so sitting on the other side of an open car door Matty winds up the window. As she fades away behind it, an image of the now hat wearing Ned rolls up. To me this is when Ned truly becomes a noir protagonist, capable of murder. The image in the window is a mirror of his true self. To enforce this doom the next scene has Ned and Matty caught in the act for the first time. Quite ironic considering how the hat was supposed to protect him. Earlier Ned had said: "Sometimes the sh*t comes down so heavy I feel I should wear a hat." So Matty gets him one.

The dialogue is written in a very tongue in cheek and noirish way. It provides some comic relief to this mostly serious movie, and it works great. Here is one witty exchange between Matty and Ned as they sit at a bar, all sweaty from the heat:

M: My temperature runs a couple of degrees high around the hundred. I don't mind, it's the engine or something.

N: Maybe you need a tune up?

M: Don't tell me, you have just the right tool?

N: I don't talk like that.

The ending to this tale of lust and greed is most satisfactory. I won't give it all away, but I must mention that while I do feel Matty actually did fall in love with Ned, it turns out she loved money more. It comes at a high price to her, but she most definitely would've done it all over again if she had to. I can't think of a more interesting, entertaining and devious femme fatale in recent movie history.

My opinion is clear. This isn't a blatant *Double Indemnity* rip-off, this is the *Double Indemnity* of the 80s.

One of Those Films That Is So Hot and Humid That It Makes All the Glass Fog Up.
[tfrizzell3](#) November 2003

A lightning fast affair develops between the ultra-hot and erotic Kathleen Turner and small-time Florida attorney William Hurt in the middle of an unprecedented heatwave in "Body Heat", arguably the most under-rated and most under-appreciated movie of the 1980s. Turner is the wife of a ridiculously rich businessman (Richard Crenna) and soon an elaborate plan hatches to kill him so the duo can be together forever.

Naturally there is a lot more to Turner than meets the eye (Boy that is an understatement!) and Hurt becomes trapped in a super-steamy, but also highly dangerous relationship. Will the heat be too much for him in the end and are Turner's motives as clear as they appear? "Body Heat" could best be described as "Double Indemnity" for the sexed-up 1980s crowd. The sex is excessive and intense. By the end of the picture you feel like you had known Turner and Hurt for years (even though both were relative newcomers).

Writer/director Lawrence Kasdan hit a major grand-slam with his first film-making venture. He had done work writing for the "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones" group of films, but this was the first project where he went exclusively out on his own. No one knew really what to make of the movie in 1981 and thus it did fair business at the box office and was indifferent with the critics (it failed any Oscar consideration). As the years pass it becomes monumentally important to modern film-making and a classic homage to film noir-styled over-excesses. Brilliantly made in every way, well-acted, superbly written and directed, "Body Heat" is one of those films that forces you to look, let your hair down and eventually loosen your collar. 4.5 out of 5 stars.