

Marathon man (1976) Schlesinger

P Michell - May, 2016

MARATHON MAN, directed by John Schlesinger; screenplay by William Goldman, based on his novel; produced by Robert Evans and Sidney Beckerman; director of photography, Conrad Hall; editor, Jim Clark; music, Michael Small; distributed by Paramount Pictures. Running time: 125 minutes.

Babe Dustin Hoffman
Szell Laurence Olivier
Doc Roy Scheider
Janeway William Devane
Elsa Marthe Keller
Prof. Blesenthal Fritz Weaver
Karl Richard Bright
Erhard Marc Lawrence
Babe's father Allen Joseph
Melendez Tito Goya
Szell's brother Ben Dova
Rosenbaum Lou Gilbert
LeClerc Jacques Marin
Chen James Wing Woo

Synopsis:

In New York, the brother of an infamous Nazi war criminal is killed in a head-on collision with an oil truck. Shortly thereafter, members of a covert U.S. government group called the Division begin being murdered one by one. Meanwhile, graduate student and marathon runner Thomas "Babe" Levy (Hoffman) researches history as his father, who committed suicide after the Communist witch hunts of the McCarthy era ruined his reputation. When he sees his brother, one Division member, stabbed to death, it is revealed that Christian Szell (Olivier), the White Angel of Auschwitz, is wrapping up loose ends to smuggle priceless diamonds from the United States.

General: Info:

Interesting film using Production group responsible for Chinatown (1974). Coupled with strong acting styles. Olivier – Theatre. Hoffman – Cinema. Both have achieved accolades in other's field – thus Olivier in screen Hamlet (1948), Rebecca (1940) etc. Hoffman in Death of a Salesman etc on Broadway.

This film is all about the script ...and delivery by the actors. Even smaller parts well cast.

Referencing film noir of the 1940s.

The late 1960s student uprisings had significant affect on films. Copuled with the dissolution of the movie mogusl. New ones filled the breach.

A darker view of the world was being examined. Who's Afraid of Virgiina Wolf (1966).

During the 1970s a number of films were made that examined corruption within US government and/or its intelligence arms – particularly the CIA: The Parallax View (1974), All The Presidents Men (1976), The Conversation (1974), The Candidate (1972), Three Days of the Condor (1975), Executive Action (1973),

Other Nazi themed films – Selection only - Judgement at Nuremburg (1961), Pawnbroker (1964), Dr Strangelove (1964) included character. Odessa File (1974), Voyage of the Damned (1976), Left Luggage (1998), The Pianist (2002), Everything is Illuminated (2005) Superb film based on book with Elijah Wood – clearly labour of love directed by Liev Scribeber. Jakob the Liar (1999), Last Metro (1980), Life is Beautiful (1997).

Robert Evans – Producer

One of the new 'young bucks' entering cinema.

Producer at Paramount - In the late 1960s and early '70s, he became the quintessential "new Hollywood" executive, with: slickly packaged productions like [Rosemary's Baby](#) (1968), [Love Story](#) (1970) and [The Godfather](#) (1972) revived Paramount. (The latter film and [Chinatown](#) are the artistic highlights of Evans' Paramount career, though the amount of credit he deserves for them has been debated for decades.) Eased out of Paramount, he saw [The Cotton Club](#) (1984) turn from a musical "Godfather" into a fiasco of front-page proportions.

John Schelssinger (1926-2003) – Director

Known for string of 1960s films: Kind of Loving (1962), Billy Liar (1963) Far from Maddening Crowd (1967), Midnight Cowboy (1969) (with Hoffman), Sunday Bloody Sunday (1971)

Schlesinger's artistic fulfillment increasingly came from directing for the stage and, specifically, opera. He directed [William Shakespeare's](#) "Timon of Athens" for the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in 1964, and after his movie career faded (in 1980s), he directed plays, musicals, and opera productions. After [Laurence Olivier](#) was eased out of the National Theatre in 1973, Schlesinger was named an associate director of the NT under Olivier's successor, Sir [Peter Hall](#) of the RSC.

Robert Towne (1934 -) – Writer, Script Doctor

Writer, director, producer, actor. Born in Los Angeles, California, USA, and raised in the seaport town of San Pedro. Got his start acting and writing for legendary exploitation director/producer [Roger Corman](#). Came into his own during the 1970s when he was regarded as one of the finest screenwriters in Hollywood. Began directing with mixed success in 1982. One of the best script doctors in Hollywood, he contributed crucial scenes to such films as [Bonnie and Clyde](#) (1967) and [The Godfather](#) (1972).

Prolific writer as well. In addition: the Last Detail (1973). The Parallax View (1974), Shampoo (1975), Tequila Sunrise (1988), etc. Sadly he did Mission Impossible (I and II!).

William Goldman (1931 -) – Novel & Script

Prolific writer including plays, non-fiction, .

Marathon Man was the first of his 'thrillers' novels. Predates movie by two years.

Described as 'one of the late twentieth century's most popular storytellers'.

Known for Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969), All the Presidents Men. The Princess Bride (1987) [and novel], Stepford Wives (1975).

Later became a script doctor as well. Working uncredited on Good Will Hunting (1997), A Few Good Men (1992).

Favourite authors: Cervantes, Chekhov, Muagham, Iriwn Shaw & Tolstoy.

Quote (2000):

"Someone pointed out to me that the most sympathetic characters in my books always died miserably. I didn't consciously know I was doing that. I didn't. I mean, I didn't wake up each morning and think, today I think I'll make a really terrific guy so I can kill him. It just worked out that way. I haven't written a novel in over a decade... and someone very wise suggested that I might have stopped writing novels because my rage was gone. It's possible. All this doesn't mean a helluva lot, except probably there is a reason I was the guy who gave Babe over to Szell in the "Is it safe?" scene and that I was the guy who put Westley into The Machine. I think I have a way with pain. When I come to that kind of sequence I have a certain confidence that I can make it play. Because I come from such a dark corner."

Trivia:

Producer [Robert Evans](#) was set upon getting [Laurence Olivier](#) to play the role of Szell. However, because Olivier at the time was riddled with cancer, thus uninsurable - so Paramount refused to use him. In desperation, Evans called his friends [Merle Oberon](#) and [David Niven](#) to arrange a meeting with the House of Lords (the upper body of the British parliament). There, he urged them to put pressure on Lloyd's of London to insure Britain's greatest living actor. The ploy succeeded and a frail Olivier started working on the film. In the end, not only did he net an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor, but his cancer also went into remission. Olivier lived on for another 13 years.

[Laurence Olivier](#) took the role of Szell in part to leave a great deal of money to his wife and children, as he expected to die from the cancer that afflicted him throughout production. He performed the role while undergoing treatment for his cancer, which included heavy doses of painkillers to allow him to work every day. The pain medication affected his memory and at times the actor could not remember more than one or two of his lines at a time. In a testament to the actor's

fierce concentration, his performance garnered rave reviews and an Oscar nomination.

On the last day of shooting, [Laurence Olivier](#) visited [Dustin Hoffman](#) at his home, bringing with him "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare" as a gift. He then proceeded to read scenes from several of the plays, much to Hoffman's delight. The actor credits the story about his conflict with Olivier to general malice on the part of writer [William Goldman](#), who did not take kindly to the fact that Hoffman had persuaded director [John Schlesinger](#) to change the ending of Goldman's book.

The film changes the novel's ending, and Goldman thought the new ending was "shit". He felt the way the film ended, it left out two important plot clarifications. In the novel, Babe led Szell by gunpoint to Central Park, and shoots him multiple times, subsequently lecturing him. He then threw the diamonds away and is quietly led away by a policeman.

In the novel, Doc meets one of his rivals as an assassin at Los Angeles International Airport, and the two talk. Doc realizes that all assassins such as himself eventually are killed and, indeed, the fellow assassin is soon murdered in an airport rest room. Doc nearly kills the men who did it, which shows his behavior is becoming erratic and he may too soon be terminated. The incident makes Doc realize that the one thing he wants in his life is to die in the company of someone who loves him, not in the sordid manner of his fellow assassin. This desire explains Doc's motivation of going to his brother Babe after being mortally wounded, an action which is misunderstood by Szell and Janeway. In the movie, Doc's near murder of the killers of his fellow assassin was filmed, but cut, which also likely eliminated the motivation of why Doc goes to Babe.

According to producer [Robert Evans](#), in a rare twist, all his first choices for the film's leads--[Dustin Hoffman](#), [Laurence Olivier](#), [Roy Scheider](#), [William Devane](#) and [Marthe Keller](#)--were all cast in the roles they were envisioned for.

Screenwriter [Robert Towne](#) did an uncredited rewrite on the ending climactic waterworks scene between Babe and Szell. Towne's rewrite had Babe force Szell to eat the diamonds. Towne also changed Szell's death to self-inflicted.

Weird Trivia –

Joseph Spah (billed as Ben Dova), portraying Szell's brother, is the driver of the stalled car involved in the opening car-truck collision. Mr. Spah was a survivor of the Hindenburg (airship) disaster of 1937.

Producer Robert Evans' father was a dentist with a thriving practice in Harlem, New York. One of the first racially integrated ones in USA.

Reviews:

Roger Ebert's 1976 piece:

<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/marathon-man-1976>

A prime example of the way highly styled entertainment should be...

Author: [Righty-Sock \(robertfrangie@hotmail.com\)](mailto:robertfrangie@hotmail.com) from Mexico

1 September 2007

Schlesinger made a great action-suspense film and married it to the artistry of unique talents... Hoffman was, by then, a dynamic, young and incredibly versatile film actor with three Academy Award nominations already under his belt for "The Graduate," "Midnight Cowboy," and "Lenny."

But the key to "Marathon Man" was the chemistry between its stars... Perhaps one of the most gut-wrenching and most memorable scenes in the film comes when Hoffman is captured and tortured by Olivier who plays the role of a mean and vicious and sadistic Nazi war criminal, Christian Szell... Olivier's performance resulted in a 1976 Academy Award nomination as Best Supporting Actor...

In 1945, Szell ran the experimental camp at Auschwitz where they called him the White Angel... He was a dentist and could provide escape for any Jew who was willing to pay the price... He started out with gold, naturally, but very quickly worked his way up to diamonds...

As Szell saw the end early, he sneaked his brother into America with the diamonds... And they were right here, in New York, in a safe deposit-box until Szell's brother got killed in a head-on collision with an oil truck...

Uniquely built, and with a marvelous, rugged face, Roy Scheider, well known for his strong performances in "The French Connection," "Klute," and "Jaws," came on board as Hoffman's mysterious businessman brother, getting the rare chance to play a character that's both hero and villain... Doc is a fascinating guy because he chooses to work out his problems in a much different way than Dustin's character does... He was very touched and very moved by his father's death, but he abandoned all his hopes for whatever he intended to do and he became a spy, a killer, a very jaded personality...

In doing something truly suspenseful, Schlesinger accomplished a film that's largely about fear and it's about pain and the infliction of pain because of fear... The thrilling sensation of great expectations came on the 47th Street in the diamond district in New York, where Schlesinger gets the best of it...