1995 POZ Honors: Movies

January 1, 1996 By David Tinmouth

And then he tugged down his jacket and said “make it so”

Paul Rudnick’s off-Broadway play Jeffrey took to the silver screen. Blending serious subject matter and campy humor, Jeffrey documented the trials of HIV negative Jeffrey in coming to terms with the realities of AIDS and accepting an HIV positive man as his lover. The film also gave actor Patrick Stewart of Star Trek: the Next Generation fame a chance to femme out. Asked what he prayed for during the silence at a memorial, Stewart replied, “No more disease. No more prejudice. No more chintz.”

Unsafe sex = tragic Whoopi

Whoopi Goldberg continued her tradition of taking on roles others might consider dangerous by playing a lesbian supporting an HIV positive heterosexual woman in Boys On the Side. “Gay folks will go through stages in the movies like black people did,” she said in regard to how HIV has factored into mainstream representation of gays and lesbians. “There was the tragic mulatto; now there’ll be the tragic gay person.”

This doesn’t mean The Normal Heart will be made into a film anytime soon

Philadelphia survived into 1995 in two ways. First, in the form of a televised real-life Philadelphia lawsuit that almost exactly mimicked the plot of the 1993 film. Second, in Hollywood’s new tolerance of gay and AIDS-related subject matter, which had even ornery ACT UP founder Larry Kramer admitting some good had come of the film. Are you listening, Barbara?

We don’t need another Zero

Tim Greyson’s film Zero Patience denounced the media blitz surrounding “Patient Zero”—a promiscuous French-Canadian flight attendant whom Randy Shilts and others saddled with the blame for the virus’ rapid spread across North America—as little more than homophobic scapegoating. Meanwhile, researcher David Ho denounced another Patient Zero, David Carr, as a fake. Carr, who died in 1959, was supposed to have been the first documented case of AIDS, but Ho suggested that British researchers may have “deliberately switched experimental material” in order to make such a claim.

Don’t ya just love ’em?

Cast with friends of its young scriptwriter Harmony Korine, Kids aimed to scare parents and kids into acknowledgins the threat of HIV among young people. Opeening with a graphic unsafe sex scene between an HIV positive 17-year-old boy and a 14-year-old girl, the rest of the film chronicles the attempts of the newly positive teenage paramour to ensure that the same doesn’t happen again.

Kind of like the Reagan years

The always-below-50-mph plot of the Sandra Bullock vehicle The Net kicked off with the suicide of a public official who, through a computer hacker’s tampering, is made to believe he is HIV positive. Those not fixated by Bullock’s pounding at various keyboards noticed red ribbons, ACT UP flyers and even a candlelight vigil paraded unobtrusively throughout the film—but never mentioned by name.

Incubation period x death rate / coefficient of Tom Hanks = movie release date

Box-office success for movies about Ebola virus struck as fast as the lethal bug itself. A barrage of movies and books such as Outbreak and The Hot Zone convinced America that we’re in danger of an imminent microscopic annihilation. Equally deadly but much more stealthy HIV had to wait thirteen years for Tom Hanks to procure anything close to Ebola’s lightning box-office success.

This doesn’t even include Herbie Goes to Monte Carlo

The made-for-TV movie Virus added an interesting twist to the year’s media mania about dangerous bugs. The movie closely resembled Outbreak in content, with one only-in-Hollywood exception: The terrible Ebola virus was spread not through coughing or kissing but by an assassin armed with a virus-loaded vaccine gun.

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