The plot thickens — like mud — in 'Sunrise'

By JAMES DEAN
Staff Writer

There really hasn't been a good thriller out in ages. Recently, James Cameron's "Aliens" is the only movie that has had me sitting on the edge of my seat with my mind racing. But that was set in another time and another place. "No Way Out" almost did the same, but was spoiled by an unbelievably stupid ending. Both these films were a while ago now. Last year's only offering was Roman Polanski's pseudo-Hitchcockian "Frantic," which, in spite of some astonishing critical praise, was as bad and embarrassing as any film I have ever seen.

For a writer, Robert Towne, the director of **Tequila Sunrise**, has a reputation in Hollywood that is more or less unparalleled, even though he has not made a film for six years — "Personal Best" was his last effort — and the works that made him famous, "Chinatown" and "Shampoo," are almost 15 years old now. He made "Chinatown" with Polanski, and even today it looks as fresh and exciting as any film around. Towne's exemplary screenplay and Polanski's direction were more or less flawless, and together they produced one of the most clever and stylish thrillers of all time. But that was clearly a while ago. Before he made "Tequila Sunrise," Towne visited Polanski in Paris to help him with the script for "Frantic." Clearly to no avail.

On the face of it, "Tequila Sunrise" seems to have the potential to be a great thriller. Written by Towne, the plot promises to be both well-written and intricate, and the cast brings together the attractive and not untalented combination of Mel Gibson, Michelle Pfeiffer and Kurt Russell. Unfortunately, the film never gets close to fulfilling its potential.

Towne's plot simply tries to be too clever for its own good. He spends so much time developing ambiguities and red herrings that he forgets that the key to any thriller is to create tension.

His story revolves around two high school buddies, Nick Freesher (Kurt Russell) and Dale McKussic (Mel Gibson), who have remained friends despite the fact that Freesher is a cop and McKussic is a big-time drug dealer. This friendship is further strained when Freesher has instructions to arrest McKussic for his drug dealings. Without sufficient evidence, however, Freesher is required merely to obtain information from him about a shipment of drugs coming in from a big dealer in Mexico. In an attempt to get closer to his clandestine activites, Freesher befriends the hostess of McKussic's favorite restaurant (Michelle Pfeiffer), since he suspects that she is collaborating with him.

Forgive me if this is boring and overly complicated, but so was the film. Towne tries so hard to develop the backgrounds of the charcters and make sure that he gives them some breadth, that he more or less suspends the action after the initial chase sequence.

The story really could have been exciting — it just never takes off. Towne leaves too much unsaid and unexplained without making clear what is and is not important, and without ultimately incorporating everything into the final conclusion. He fails to show an important character being killed, and he barely even refers to the failure of a crucial set-up created to capture McKussic.

On the flip side, he gives undue importance to irrelevant details, which simply enhances the confusion of the plot unnecessarily. It's all very well being clever, but you have to let someone in on what you're being clever about.

Towne also fails to establish a consistent mood and direction for the film. He tries to balance the intricacies of the story with twists of humor, but they don't work. At one stage, the police are surrounding McKussic's house in an attempt to capture the Mexican drugs leader at a "party" that they've heard about, when a whole load of kids run out into the garden with balloons and party hats. It turns out that it's McKussic's son's birthday party. This really could have been funny, but Towne flattens the joke by staying at the party for about 15 minutes, while McKussic gives out hot dogs, and the cops stand around looking stupid and wondering what to do next.

By the time the climax arrives, the damage is done. Towne manages to weave in a few more plot twists, which again fail to create the impact they should, and then makes a mess of the action to such an extent that it becomes more confusing than exciting. His overconcern with the sensibilities of the characters destroys the progression of the film, which no amount of exploding speedboats can bring back to life.

In the lead roles, Russell, Gibson and Pfeiffer work well together. All three are a cut above most mainstream Hollywood stars. They develop their characters consistently, and their eventual shortcomings are as much the fault of the script as anything.

Towne does manage to leave some imprint on the film. Once it gets going, his sparkling dialogue is a joy to listen to. Also, some of the scenes, especially the conversation between McKussic and Freesher on the swings with the sunset in the background, are beautifully filmed. But neither of these aspects can redeem the emptiness of the rest of the film.

And it is a shame. "Tequila Sunrise" really should have been a good film. It had the cast, it had the writer, and it had a potentially thrilling story. Just like "Chinatown," actually. "Chinatown," however, was well-directed, and its plot managed to maintain a permanent tension for the audience by raising intriguing questions and answering them at the right time. Of "Tequila Sunrise," this cannot be said.

'The Naked Gun' has silly aim

By LESLEY BARTLETT
Staff Writer

Fans of "Police Squad" will be thrilled to discover **The Naked Gun**, a recently released movie, which continues in the slapstick tradition of the television series. The movie focuses on Lt. Frank Drebin, still played by the polished, silver-haired Leslie Nielsen. *Any* success of the film should be credited to Nielsen, who submits his usual comical performance.

The movie suffers mainly from discontinuity. Four writers, Jerry Zucker, Jim Abrahams, David Zucker and Pat Proft collaborated on the script and, judging from the finished product, each wrote separate parts and then patched them together. The result forms a single, disjointed story. The first five minutes of the movie follow Lt. Drebin as he demolishes an international terrorist ring. The next 25 minutes concentrate on a police officer who is shot at the docks in Los Angeles during a thwarted heroin bust. The remainder of the film focuses on the "Police Squad," specifically on Drebin, as he struggles to protect Queen Elizabeth II from an assassination attempt during her visit to Los Angeles. The story lines are incredibly tangential. If you do venture out to see this film, don't expect to find a clever, or even clear, plot.

Likewise, "The Naked Gun" should not be seen by anyone unwilling to check his refined mind at the front door. The bulk of the humor is derived from crude jokes about biological functions and parts of the anatomy, which eventually become quite irritating. The jokes are stale, and, even in Nielsen's capable hands, they can't be pulled off.

The script naturally includes the stock dumb blonde, played by Priscilla Presley, who serves as Drebin's love interest. To her credit, Presley does a good job with the flat character she is given, although it's obvious that she lacks Nielsen's experience with comedy.

But if you're willing to overlook these less-than-creative stabs at humor, the movie does contain some genuinely funny lines. In one scene, Lt. Drebin brags that he shot five deviants dressed in togas who were violently stabbing a man in the park, only to be reminded by the mayor that, in reality, he had shot five actors in the middle of a Shakespeare in the Park rendition of "Julius Ceasar." Although this scene is minor and is executed with little effort, it perfectly illustrates what Nielsen can do with a fresh, original script.

The final 20 minutes of the movie are equally hilarious with Drebin disguised as an umpire at a California Angels baseball game. He attempts to uncover the Queen's prospective assassin by frisking the players as they step to the plate. Nielsen's animated acting and particularly his facial expressions really bring life to this part of the film.

In general, "The Naked Gun" does not live up to its predecessors. Jerry Zucker, Abrahams and David Zucker previously combined their efforts on both "Airplane" and "Ruthless People" with positive, effective results. Conversely, their current endeavor seems little more than a series of sketches which barely relate to each other. This lack of continuity could be pardoned if the main focus of the film, the humor, benefitted from it. But the humor itself is not sustained consistently throughout the film, and actually suffers more when the story line is unclear.

Once the plot is settled, there are moments when the movie shines, but these moments are too few to consider the movie an overall success.

WXYC Top 20

1.	Sonic Youth	Daydream Nation
2.	Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds	Tender Prey
3.	Waterboys	Fisherman's Blues
4.	Dinosaur Jr.	Bug
5.	Downsiders	All My Friends are Fish
6.	Lime Spiders	Volatile
7.	R.E.M.	Green
8.	Fairground Attraction	The First of a Million Kisses
9.	Lilac Time	Lilac Time
10.	Go Betweens	16 Cover Line
11.	Julian Cope	My Nation Underground
12.	Scrawl	He's Drunk
13.	Penelope Houston	Bird Boy
14.	Danielle Dax	Dark Adopted Eye
15.	Scruffy the Cat	Moons of Jupiter
16.	Big Dipper	Craps
17.	The Scene is Now	Tonight We Ride
18.	Steve Earle	Copperhead Raod
19.	Squalls	No Time
20.	Sound Garden	Ultramega OK

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