

A walk on the wild side

New film *Rush* ODs on reality

by Robb Frederick
The Collegian

According to the latest American work ethic (one we can thank the success-oriented 80's for), the eight-hour day has again been amended and expanded. These days, accountants and personnel managers work through lunches, take home thick work files and stop by the office on Saturday mornings. The sacrifice has become a prerequisite for advancement, a minor concession paving the way to the bigger office across the hall.

But when you're an undercover narc dealing cocaine and heroin, after hours work can lead to a much different place.

Hence the premise behind *Rush*, a gritty new film that takes cops out of the donut shops and into the depths of chemical dependency.

Based on Kim Wozencraft's 1990 novel of the same name, *Rush* documents the first assignment of rookie cop Kristin Cates (Jennifer Jason Leigh), a Catholic-school girl who slips into the throes of addiction while trying to land a drug buy with a local pusher (Gregg Allman).

Taken under the wing of partner Jim Raynor (a superb Jason Patric), Cates comes face to face with one brutal realization: in a smoke-filled world without police backup and tidy time cards, when a string of sleepless nights forces nars to sample their evidence during drug buys, it's easy to lose sight of the boundaries between right and wrong.

Before long, Cates has crossed those lines. The innocent rookie is reduced to a bleary-eyed junkie, crawling across a frayed carpet in search of imaginary pills.

Raynor's spiral is even more disturbing. After injecting the evidence from a dozen cases, he disappears, only to barricade himself in an empty apartment, a wavering shotgun clasped between his legs. When the pair fabricates a case against Allman



and prepares for the trial, Raynor calmly sears his needle-pocked arm with a hot iron, hoping to mask the evidence of his intravenous binges. Andy Griffith never dreamt of things getting this bad.

First-time director Lili Fini Zanuck keeps the film dark and dreary, slapping her audience in the face with graphic scenes of drug use and the inevitable withdrawal that follows. Everything about this film is ugly, from the ragged bell-bottomed flares Raynor and Cates wear to the brutal sex scene that carries them through a moment of drug-induced paranoia.

These heroes are far from perfect. But their flaws give the film its substance, reminding us that even the good guys have their bad moments.

Leigh and Patric are at their best during those moments. She pulls us in with her wide-eyed innocence, and he batters us over the head with the intensity of life on the edge.

Patric (*The Lost Boys*) is one of Hollywood's most overlooked character actors. There's no denying his trembling anticipation before each fix, and when he introduces Cates to the undercover style of retribution,

we know he only has one way out.

Even more impressive, however, are the supporting roles filled by Max Perlich and newcomer Special K McCray, two pushers who carry us deep into the bowels of the drug trade.

Perlich revives his role in *Drugstore Cowboy* as a second-rate dealer who can't make it in the business; this time he's forced to choose between squealing on his junkie friends or serving a 30-year prison sentence.

McCray provides the film's most harrowing character; with his tongue flopping around his greasy mug, he looks like Jabba the Hut come to life. And when he explains the sensual rush that comes with each fix, stroking his velour-clad crotch with a snub-nosed revolver all the while, we have to vent the revulsion Cates fights to keep to herself.

Rush has its weak moments, but Zanuck has nonetheless directed one of the most realistic police films in years. The film's end may be predictable, but we still squirm when it comes. And we leave the theater with a new angle on the age-old conflict of good vs. evil -- one that frightens us by revealing how close the two can come.

Clapton's soundtrack smolders

There are two kinds of film soundtracks.

The first focuses on sheer star-power, compiling a smorgasbord of sure-fire hits from today's top bands. Take the chart-bound *Until the End of the World*, for example, which boasts hot new tracks from U2, R.E.M. and Talking Heads (see review on page 13).

The second delves into the heart of the film, grasping at the lyrical mood that sets the stage for the action onscreen. Case in point: *Rush*, a collection of original atmospheric tracks by guitar god Eric Clapton.

With a few exceptions, the numbers on *Rush* aren't meant to stand on their own. Most aren't even songs; they're brief flashes of emotion or quick sketches of the dark depression that hovers over the entire film. On their own, the tracks are easy to push aside, but together they form the undeniable image of a nightmare that has spiraled beyond control.

Clapton's music has always been rooted in the blues, and since he has already made the transition to soundtrack recording (*Lethal Weapon II*), he was the natural choice for *Rush*.

The payoff is obvious from the second track, the instrumental "Tracks and Lines," which sets the smoldering tone that continues throughout the disc.

Clapton offsets the slow burn of "Realization" with his characteristic clean, soaring fretwork. The rattlesnake effects would sound campy in another track, but here they just heighten the tension.

The performance demands attention, simply because it cements Clapton's seat at the head of the rock pantheon. Few rock musicians are willing to step out of the mainstream and into the stripped-down realm of instrumental movements, and even fewer could make the transition this easily.

Clapton himself hasn't made the leap wholeheartedly. The final three tracks on *Rush* further refine the polished blues of albums like *Journeyman*, providing a nice preview of the direction Clapton's next studio album will take.

The jouncy "Help Me Up" is a pure-bred hit, as is the closing "Tears in Heaven," which has already dug its hooks into the high end of the AOR charts.

The former reveals Clapton at his most optimistic, while the latter hints a solemn parallel to the recent death of his four-year-old son Conor.

Nestled between these tracks is the extended jam "Don't Know Which Way to Go," a collaboration with blues giant Buddy Guy.

Guy provides the lead vocals in his typical gruff manner, and Clapton completes the equation with sparse bursts of high end fretwork.

The song is a homage to Clapton's roots, but it also reinforces the message of the earlier instrumental numbers. By revealing an occasional glimmer of hope, he carries us through the more frequent darker moments. That theme vividly punctuates the film's storyline; but it also sets a new standard for thematic music releases, a standard that provides the credibility film soundtracks need in order to stand on their own.

-- Robb Frederick

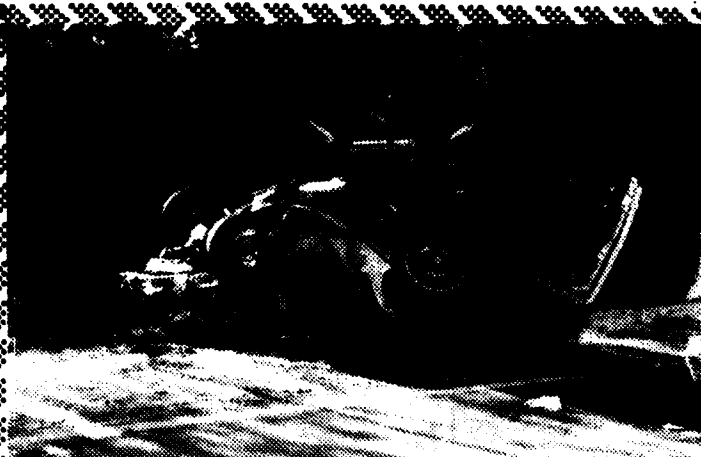


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