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1994
AGGIELAND

CINEMA

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THE BATTALION

Friday, September 3, 1993

A devilish, anticlimactic work...

'Needful Things' only slightly scary

By Joe Leih

THE BATTALION

"Needful Things"
 Starring Max von Sydow, Ed Harris,
 Bonnie Bedelia and Amanda
 Plummer
 Directed by Fraser Heston
 Rated R
 Playing at Schulman VI

Yet another Stephen King novel ("Needful Things") has been transformed into the motion picture medium, and this time, debuting director Fraser Heston is in charge of the task.

Despite the inexperience, the rookie movie man does rather well by including classic suspense, gore and scary essentials. But alas, he still unfortunately leaves out the most important element of the horror genre flick - that ever-faithful heart-stopping, gooseflesh-giving, wham-bam ending.

Max von Sydow stars as Leland Gaunt, a seemingly gentle antique dealer who unbeknownst to the town of Castle Rock is Satan himself. Setting up shop, he soon sadistically turns the townspeople against each other, while the sheriff, Alan Pangborn (Ed Harris), futilely attempts to find the source of the mayhem.

Heston wonderfully tightens the tension by slowly letting the plot switch amongst the town's members and chillingly revealing Gaunt's increasing manipulation



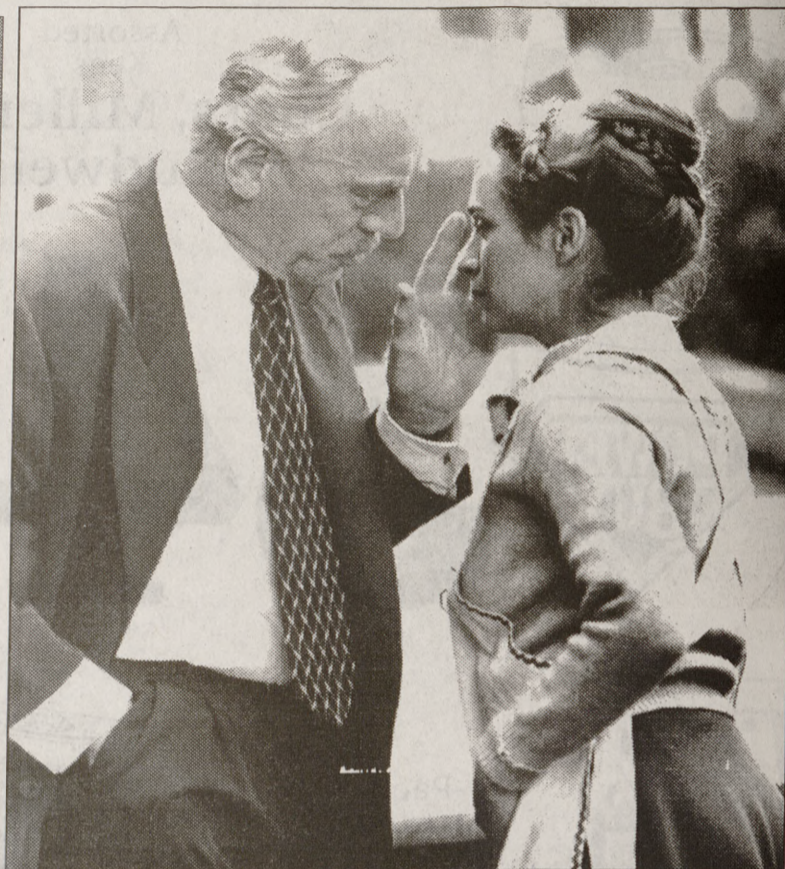
Harris

and control. Heston's continual long, moving camera shots even hint that the townspeople are all connected in the devil's deadly grip. It's a frightening effect.

Yet the peak of terror occurs when two of the town's women, cleavers in hand, brutally attack each other with an ironically serene "Ave Maria" playing in the background.

But sadly, "Needful Things" never builds from there. The rest of the film is anticlimactic and filled with far too many lame one-liners.

With a little more work, Heston could have created a spine-tingling masterpiece, but in reality he only created a slightly scary two hours of theater escapism.



Amanda Plummer is a lonely widow who succumbs to the diabolic charms of Leland Gaunt (Max von Sydow) and his newly opened antique shop. Little does she realize that Gaunt is Satan himself and is ready to destroy the little town of Castle Rock in "Needful Things."

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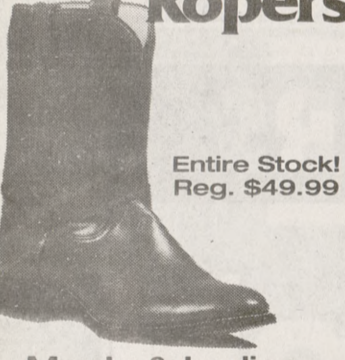
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