

Predictable plot, poor dialogue drown film



'Indian Summer'



"Indian Summer" (Douglas 3, 13th and P streets; East Park 3) is supposed to inspire nostalgia about youthful days at summer camp.

It doesn't. Instead, it subscribes to every modern movie cliché known to Hollywood.

The story covers a few days in the lives of eight former campers who return as adults to Camp Tamakwa.

The campers return to camp at the behest of "Uncle Lou" (Alan Arkin) to celebrate the last week that the camp will be open. They return to the same camp they left: males in one cabin and females in another, clanging bell at dawn, swim tests, sailing and every other typical camp experi-

ence.

But this time they're older, wiser and carrying a bargeful of baggage, physical and emotional. Shocked and dismayed about Tamakwa's fate, they try to find ways to save it while trying to work out all their adult problems, also.

Two of the former campers are married—but not to their camp sweethearts. Another has recently been widowed—her husband was also a camper. Two others are successful, but lonely and frustrated. One is a hippie and the other is a chauvinistic nymphomaniac.

But they're all such good friends. Blah. Blah. Boring.

"Indian Summer" features an all-star ensemble cast of talented young actors, including Elizabeth Perkins, Diane Lane, Julie Warner, Bill Paxton, Kevin Pollock and Vincent Spano.

Unfortunately, they all are swimming in a murky mess of poor plotting and pathetic dialogue.

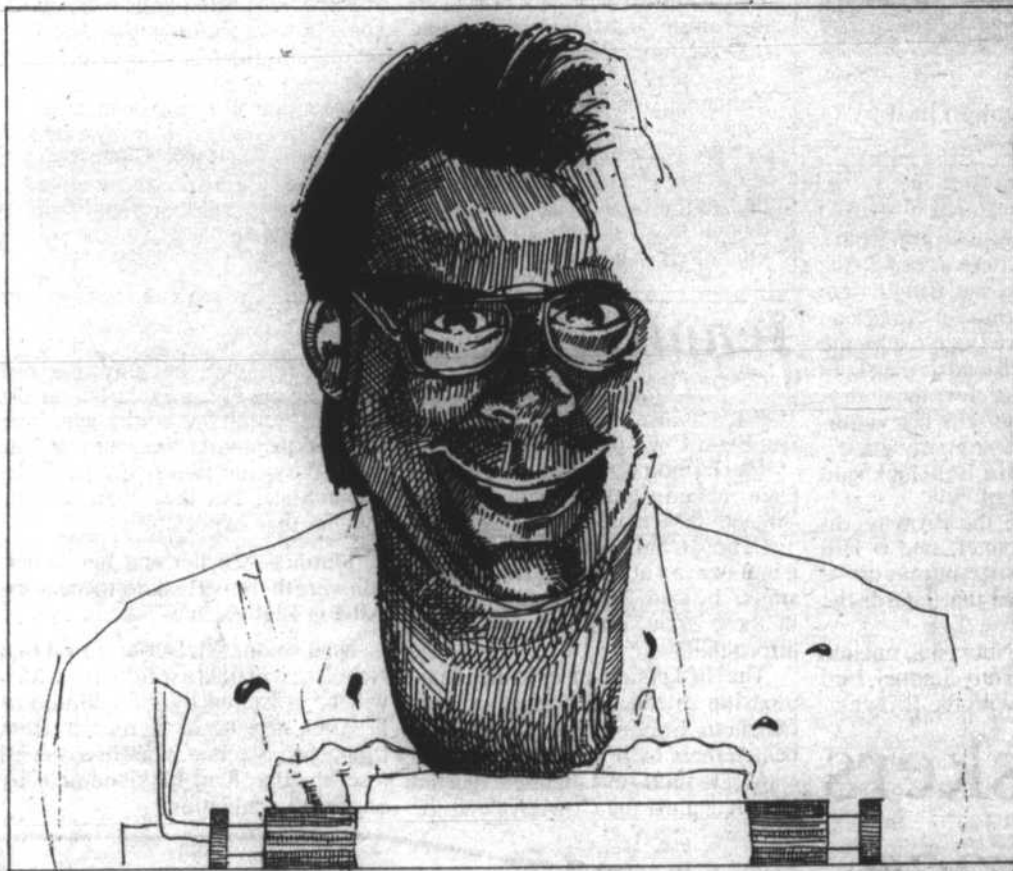
"Indian Summer" would be better left as a faint memory of youth, along with braces and bad acne.

— Anne Steyer



A group of friends reminisce in "Indian Summer."

Courtesy of Touchstone Pictures



David Badders/DN

Split-personality film fails just like most King efforts

'The Dark Half'



It's a conspiracy against Stephen King.

It seems to be a pattern: Every movie (on television or in the theater) associated with the words "Stephen King" is destined to become some moronic piece of drivel.

Think about it. "The Lawnmower Man." "Sleepwalkers." "It." "Graveyard Shift."

All are movies best forgotten. Coincidence? Hmmm...

It's no different with "The Dark Half" (Plaza 4, 12th and P streets).

Timothy Hutton (still recovering from the abysmal "The Temp") stars as Thad Beaumont—a writer who has taken on the pen name "George Stark" to produce a series of extremely violent (and extremely successful) books.

Unfortunately, "George" isn't just a name; he's part of Thad's personality that shows up to write the books.

Assuming that King's book had a similar premise, it makes one wonder what King was like when he wrote "The Running Man" under the pen name "Richard Bachman."

Anyway, some greedy jerk finds out Thad's game and threatens to expose him to the public if he doesn't come up with some money.

Instead, Thad comes forward himself, and for the People magazine article reluctantly "buries" Stark in the local graveyard, complete with headstone and epitaph of "Not A Very Nice Guy."

However, it seems that "George" doesn't want to die. Suddenly, people associated with Thad start dropping like flies and (surprise!) he's the prime suspect.

George A. Romero ("Night of the Living Dead"), who directed and adapted the book for the screen, could have helped out the audience a little bit. Sitting right at two hours in length, he could have trimmed off about 20 minutes of this sucker to make the movie drone on for less time.

Amy Madigan ("Field of Dreams") shows up as Thad's wife, Liz, but her character is extremely boring and inconsequential.

The best part of the movie is the first half (which could be called "The Good Half" for a sequel) and Hutton is what makes it work. He has that innocent, boy-next-door look in his eyes, and gets the most disconcerting look to him when "George" comes out to play.

Still, you may want to pass on this one. For a good movie about split personalities that has some suspense and surprises, go rent "Raising Cain."

— Gerry Beltz

Movie about mistreated boy made for adults, not children

'This Boy's Life'



A terrific and true story about a boy's journey to discover courage and self-confidence can be found in "This Boy's Life" (Cinema Twin, 13th and P streets).

The movie is narrated by Toby (Leonardo DiCaprio), a young boy growing up in 1957 with his slightly idealistic mother Caroline (Ellen Barkin), who is fresh out of a divorce.

They set off to Utah to get rich off uranium, but they end up taking a bus to Seattle, where she meets a mechanic named Dwight (Robert DeNiro).

On the outside, Toby is pure sugar and charm, but he (already a rebellious youth) doesn't trust Dwight.

Has anyone else noticed that the kids in these types of movies always seem to be smarter and better judges of character than the adults? Just curious.

Eventually Dwight and Caroline make plans to tie the knot, but this means Toby has to move in early with Dwight to get closer to him.

Toby doesn't even get to his new home before he finds out that Dwight is less than desirable as a father figure.

On the drive home, Dwight's cruel, abusive and manipulative sides fly out and Toby is a helpless target. Dwight is determined to get the bad element out of Toby, and he will use his "kill or cure" philosophy to do it.

About this time last year, a movie titled

"Radio Flyer" was released, telling the tale of two brothers menaced by an abusive stepfather. The film was excellent, and so is "This Boy's Life."

However, the difference here is the stepfather and the way he acts in public and what makes the character tick are addressed more.

At no point does the audience feel an iota of sympathy or respect for Dwight. He's slime, pure and simple, and he tries to disguise abuse as a character builder.

About the only flaw with DeNiro's character is his sporadic Irish accent (something like Kevin Costner somehow losing/forgetting his accent in "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves").

Barkin's character, however strong it may be, is not given enough time to fully develop or become a major force in the film past the first half-hour.

The real gem in this film is DiCaprio. He's a young boy trying to compete and just plain survive against a stronger, tougher opponent, his stepfather. He succeeds beautifully and is worthy of an Oscar nomination as well.

Unfortunately, in the eyes of the all-powerful academy, he's just a kid.

Due to lots of vulgar language and various intense abusive situations perpetrated by Dwight (against most members of the household), the R rating is appropriate and the film isn't something to cart the kids to see.

All parents and soon-to-be parents should see "This Boy's Life."

It may make them think twice before saying, "An occasional spanking is for the good of the child."

— Gerry Beltz

Solid acting creates perfect flick

'Benny & Joon'



Not since "Harold and Maude" has there been such a whimsical, eccentric and oddly charming romantic film as "Benny and Joon" (Edgewood 3, 56th Street and Highway 2; The Lincoln, 11th and P streets).

Aidan Quinn and Mary Stuart Masterson are the title characters: Benny, a mechanic, and his mentally ill younger sister, Joon.

Benny's life is consumed with his repair shop and taking care of Joon—and finding people to look after her when he's not around.

Joon loses a poker game with Benny's pals and in the bargain must take an eccentric cousin off the winner's hands. That eccentric cousin is Sam (Johnny Depp), a hip reincarnation of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. Although Benny is skeptical at first, Sam becomes the answer to his prayers—he can stay and look after Joon while Benny's at work.

Of course, that's before Sam and Joon fall in love.

Then things get really complicated, as Benny must confront his own fear of living, loving and letting go.

The subplot romance involving Benny and his would-be girlfriend, actress-turned-waitress Ruthie (Julianne Moore), is a nice look at the troubles of a "normal" relationship. Quinn is understated (and gorgeous) in the best guy-next-door manner.

"Benny and Joon" is definitely filled with idiosyncrasies—Sam's process of grilling cheese sandwiches, mashing potatoes and cleaning; Benny's poker games stakes; Joon's oddly endearing mental lapses.

In fact, Joon's characterization, the glamorizing of mental illness, is perhaps the only weak part of the film. But in spite of this, it makes a point that illness doesn't necessarily mean incapable incompetence.

The acting is solid—Masterson plays well off Depp's quiet craziness. There's a sweet, charming romance wrought with whimsy and eccentricity—a perfect description for the whole picture.

Don't miss "Benny and Joon."

— Anne Steyer