

# Journalism movie edits a few of the finer details

BARRY HERTZ

REVIEW

**Target Number One**  
CLASSIFICATION: 14A; 135 MINUTES

Written and directed by Daniel Roby  
Starring Josh Hartnett, Antoine Olivier Pilon and Jim Gaffigan  
★★★

There are three rules when it comes to movies about journalists. The first is that you cannot make a journalism movie unless it is about crusading journalists – investigative bloodhounds who will go to any lengths and blow any expense accounts to uncover the shocking truth about our compromised world. (And, of course, they’ll need the front page, dammit.) The second rule is that the journalist must also be portrayed as something of a jerk, putting the story above everything else in his or her life, including health, family and the work-life balance of their overtaxed editors. And the third rule? Well, it’s that journalists themselves go absolutely bonkers for these movies, which tend to self-righteously reaffirm so many of our poor career choices.

So I was in the tank for *Target Number One* – a new thriller focusing on a reporter’s struggle to expose corruption in the Canadian and Thai legal systems – from the get-go. But I wasn’t quite prepared for how large a role my employer, The Globe and Mail, plays in the film itself. When the film’s hero first utters the phrase, “I’m here for The Globe” and slaps down a copy of the newspaper – not some movie-land fictionalization, but an actual Globe and Mail with the correct font and everything – I was hooked.

Your mileage may vary, though. Especially if you find journalists like Victor Malarek – a real-life scribe who reported for The Globe in the eighties and now works for CTV’s *W5* – more annoying than inspiring. As portrayed by Josh Hartnett in director Daniel Roby’s new film, Malarek teeters between tenacious truth-teller and abrasive ass. He is convinced that there is a massive story of corruption and greed brewing in Thailand involving drug dealers, the RCMP and an innocent Canadian addict serving a 100-year prison sentence. The cops won’t tell him anything, his editors are skeptical, and he’s maybe using the story as an excuse to run away from his newfound parental responsibilities. But the man has a “gut instinct” – which is also the title of Malarek’s 1996 memoirs – and so off he goes into Thailand to set things right.

If Roby simply traced Malarek’s journey, it would have been compelling enough material, at least for the very narrow audience of The Globe and Mail writers tasked with reviewing this movie. Fortunately, the Québécois filmmaker is just as interested in the plight of jailed ne’er-do-well Daniel Léger (Antoine Olivier Pilon) and the lazy cop (Stephen McHattie) responsible for the mess as he is in the mechanics of The Globe. The result is a three-pronged narrative that inventively plays with structure and time, allowing the natural dramatic tension of Malarek’s international chase to nicely dovetail with Léger’s ugly experiences in the criminal justice system.

In between, Roby finds a good amount of room to let comedian Jim Gaffigan play entertainingly against type as Léger’s conniving criminal associate, and even squeezes in an obligatory Cancun appearance by Don McKellar as Malarek’s *W5* colleague. There is not much more you could ask of a Canadian thriller, even if the director lets the Thailand-set portions of the film devolve slightly into clichéd *Broke-down Palace* territory.

Then there are the various elisions when it comes to the down-and-dirty work of journalism, with Roby depicting the profession as one of shortcuts and leaps of faith. It’s not an insulting simplification of the job as much as it is a standard Hollywood-ization, familiar to anyone who has seen *State of Play* or *Truth or Shock and Awe*. I only wish it was more in line with Tom McCarthy’s *Spotlight*, which was careful to underline the slow and methodical reality of the job.

Coincidentally, McCarthy sent a few of his *Spotlight* actors over to The Globe for research purposes – something that Roby did with Hartnett, too. But maybe *Target Number One* (which is being released as the blandly titled *Most Wanted* in the U.S.) should have taken a bit more time to nail down the specifics of The Globe. For starters: The paper has never published Sundays, despite the insistence of Malarek’s editor. The office where reporters get into various shouting matches has approximately 100-per-cent more natural light than the paper’s real eights headquarters ever did. And the fact that a unionized writer like Malarek might get fired because he hasn’t written anything in two months is ... um ... interesting.

Granted, these are slip-ups that only Globe employees would gripe about. But when you’re making a movie about a principled quest for the truth, details matter. *Target Number One* reports, but audiences decide.

*Target Number One* opens Friday in Quebec and B.C. theatres, with more Canadian locations to be announced over the summer.

FIRST PERSON

# A PANDEMIC CAN’T STOP A WEDDING



ILLUSTRATION BY MARY KIRKPATRICK

It was not the ceremony my daughter had dreamed of, but her elopement on my lawn focused on what’s really important, **Rhonda Bulmer** writes

Like many little girls of her generation, my daughter Robyn was enthralled with dressing up and playing make believe. She loved velvet and pink tulle and silver crowns embossed with plastic jewels which filled our costume box. One day, when she was 9 or 10, she asked me if we could have a fancy dinner.

“We all dress up for dinner, and then we dance in the living room,” she said.

I shrugged. “I guess so,” I replied. Her little sister vibrated and squealed with excitement. They ran off to put on their fanciest dresses and left me in the kitchen to stare at the pot of spaghetti boiling on the stove.

What could I do to fancy up spaghetti? I grated real cheese.

I put candles on the table and rifled through my closet for a dress. When Dad arrived home, the girls informed him – their feet tapping, hands on fancy hips – that he was to get dressed up and make his way to our little eat-in kitchen, *tout de suite*.

His look of fatigue changed to confusion, and then obedience. He took the stairs two at a time, and returned in a suit and tie.

After dinner, I think we moved the coffee table out of the way and jumped around to the *Shrek* soundtrack. Thus began a family tradition of occasional Fancy Dinners.

A similar bold announcement came a decade-and-a-half later, when an engaged Robyn was to be married on my front lawn, six days hence.

She and her fiancé had been engaged for a few months, and the original plan had been to have a smallish wedding in October in Dorchester, N.B., at Lady Smith Manor – a 10,000-square-foot Georgian home that’s become a wedding venue. She had even put a large down payment on an expensive gown, which was to arrive in June.

But COVID-19 hit like a truck in the broad side of a building. They had hung on to the hope that their October date would still work out until the New Brunswick government closed the borders. The groom’s entire family live out of province, including his parents. There was just too much uncertainty. Robyn and her beloved didn’t want to have a big wedding without them, and they didn’t want to wait another year to start their lives together. They decided to elope.

Our pastor, who is also a long-time family friend, agreed to marry them on our front steps on a Sunday night in May, chosen because it was the one sunny day between the forecast of several rainy days. People could drive up and watch from their cars or stand on the boulevard. From their front porches, the neighbours could share the big event.

“On my front lawn?” Once again, my eyebrows flew up. Once again, I agreed to an unusual event, but to me, the stakes were much higher.

My front lawn was a yellow, barren, spring scandal. Patches of mud and rocks. Acidic soil that would only accommodate moss. The oak and Nor-

way maples lining our boulevard were still asleep. And our modest home was nothing to look at: decades-old vinyl siding, ancient windows, a broken screen door and a crumbling front step.

How could I make it wedding-worthy in only a few days? With lipstick and rouge on an old face, that’s how.

We slapped on fresh paint and spread cedar mulch and crushed stone. We potted spring flowers and found candles. My sister-in-law brought over a makeshift arch of birch saplings strung with lights. We added wooden benches, and baked chocolate cupcakes for visitors, plus a small wedding cake.

It wasn’t the English garden I would have wished for, but it was as nice as it could be under the circumstances. The night before the wedding, when we were putting on the final touches, a man and his wife passed by on their evening walk. “Are you having a birthday party?” he asked.

“No,” I replied. “My daughter is getting married tomorrow.”

“Do you have any music?” he asked. I’d seen him before, out walking his dog. I knew he lived in the neighbourhood.

When I said no, he offered to come and play his bagpipes, so that my daughter had music to walk up the sidewalk with her dad.

And just like that, it became a community wedding. She bought a dress at a second-hand store for \$10, her aunt fashioned a shrug out of an old angora sweater. She also pulled some flowers together from bouquets purchased at Costco.

Facebook Live made it possible for friends and family to tune in from wherever they lived. I think this is fitting, given that all three of my children have grown up in the selfie age,

an era where people are used to preening for pictures and video and posting them all publicly. They are a generation of kids who know how to pose, who expect to be watched. It’s no wonder that Robyn grew up to study filmmaking, when so much of her life was on film.

After the papers were signed and the cake was cut and people scurried away, we had one more fancy dinner together, as a “pandemic bubble” family. Chicken and potatoes and wedding cake for dessert. There were candles on the table and sparkling white wine. They danced their first dance in the living room. Then we kissed them, prayed for them, wished them well and sent them home. Simple and sweet, just like our lives.

I cried that Sunday. Exhausted from a whirlwind week, I slept on Monday. The viral pandemic had ruined everyone’s plans. This was not the event my daughter had hoped for. And yet, in the midst of it, we let go of all the trappings of luxury and convenience to focus on what is really important.

Sometimes, if you’re very, very lucky, life brings you full circle.

Rhonda Bulmer lives in Moncton.

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First Person is a daily personal piece submitted by readers

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TODAY’S SUDOKU SOLUTION

2	1	4	3	6	9	8	5	7
9	6	7	2	8	5	1	3	4
5	3	8	4	1	7	9	6	2
7	2	9	6	5	8	4	1	3
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TODAY’S KENKEN SOLUTION

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2	1	<sup>3-</sup> 6	3	<sup>15+</sup> 4	5
<sup>5</sup> 5	<sup>48×</sup> 4	3	<sup>2÷</sup> 1	2	6
<sup>1-</sup> 3	<sup>1-</sup> 6	4	<sup>3÷</sup> 2	<sup>5</sup> 5	<sup>6+</sup> 1
4	5	<sup>1</sup> 1	6	3	2

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