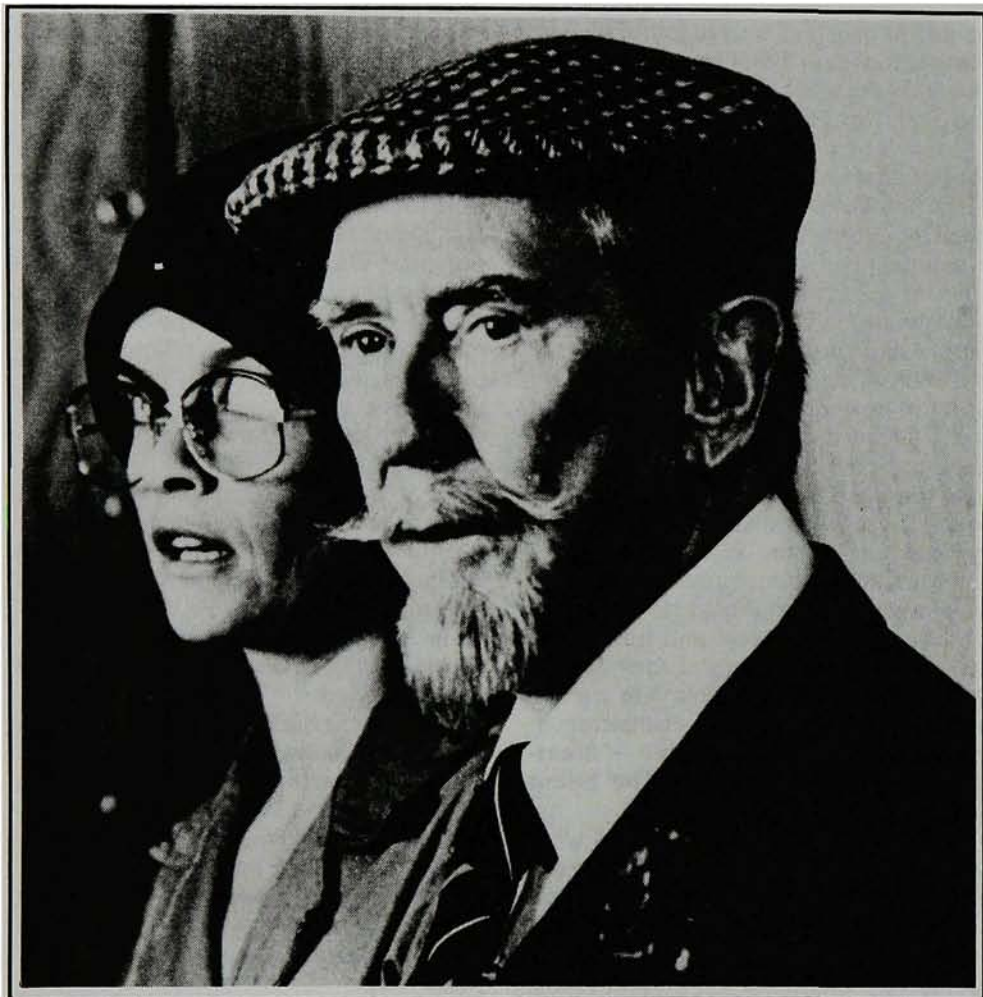


# FILM REVIEWS



The fur soon flies behind the Iron Curtain for TV newsgroup Nicole Thompson (Geneviève Bujold) and fur importer, Zak (Burgess Meredith) in *Final Assignment*.

## Paul Almond's *Final Assignment*

In an early sequence of *Final Assignment*, directed by Paul Almond, TV newsgroup Nicole Thompson, played by Geneviève Bujold, is seen interviewing an elderly fur importer played by Burgess Meredith. She asks him why he does business with Eastern Block countries and he replies that in times of trouble he likes to be where it's quietest, at the centre of the storm, floating like a butterfly. As it turns out, this remark doesn't happen to have a great deal to do with the film even though I think it's supposed to. But as a metaphor, it may have some application

to the tempest called Canadian Film.

There was an inevitable excitement produced in this country when the film industry moved into higher production gear. For a while it seemed that movies were being made everywhere, and we looked on as producers' budget figures led us to think we'd entered the big time. Clouds began to roll in when these films started finding their ways to festivals; but now that some of these early efforts are turning up in local theatres, the predicted storm should be full blown. The problem is that in *Final Assignment*, our butterfly looks suspiciously like a caterpillar.

*Final Assignment* is a melodramatic-thriller. Its plot concerns the previously mentioned TV newsgroup, with the perfect Canadian name of Nicole

Thompson, who accompanies the Prime Minister of Canada on a state visit to Russia where she has been promised an exclusive interview with the Secretary General of the Communist Party. Our Nicole has all the superficialities of Hollywood's version of the 'new woman' as defined by Jane Fonda in *Julia* and *The China Syndrome*: she is strong, aggressive, intelligent, articulate, impassioned; yet warm, sensitive, and believe it or not, intuitive.

While waiting for her interview, she manages to do *all* of the following: get arrested for interviewing a Soviet dissident; fall in love with a Russian bureaucrat played by Michael York, who is in charge of the press corps and personally responsible for landing Nicole's interview; save his life after he has fallen into some rapids; take *him* to bed; get involved with a Soviet scientist, Colleen Dewhurst, who can no longer tolerate the steroid experiments the Russians are performing on children; promise to make these experiments public in the West by smuggling out a video tape; and smuggle out the scientist's granddaughter who is badly in need of an operation that can only be done in Los Angeles (where else?). And she has to do all of this under the watchful eyes of an apparently incompetent KGB.

The director of *Final Assignment*, Paul Almond, was catapulted into this job as a last-minute replacement. Little in his background made him a logical choice for this type of film — except perhaps someone's idea of a potentially interesting reunion between him and his ex-wife and leading lady, Geneviève Bujold. Whatever... sitting through *Final Assignment* makes you feel that Almond didn't have either the time or the inclination to recover from the catapult. It is a film that has no sense of itself. Uncertain as to whether it wants to be a slick, stylish, fast-paced thriller or a moody, spy-from-the-cold, thoughtful drama, it ends up being drab and aimlessly plotted. It works for about five minutes when it manages to escape from dialogue that sounds constructed by committee. Within these five minutes, the editing is speeded up for the great getaway sequence and we are thrown into the emotional high-point of the film. But it would seem that the director felt we'd need some comic relief

here because he has his cast do bits of schtick. Relief? Hardly. The film just got going! Coming when it does, we aren't relieved, we're bewildered.

From bewilderment we are moved by an ending so preposterous that the silliness of the rest of the film pales in comparison. However, it is within the final sequence that the only shred of hope may be found. We see a circus troop crossing the border into Finland ahead of Nicole, the sick girl, and the fur importer. When they hear Michael York coming after them in a helicopter, they decide to make a run for it and end up in the troop's truck conspicuously marked "sirkus". The camera lingers on the word long enough for us to think perhaps Almond is attempting to formulate a commentary on all of this. If you give him the benefit of the doubt, it may cause you to smile but not the kind that will risk stretching your face.

It would be nice if we could get something positive out of this — if we could say, for example, that in spite of a moronic script, the film is a crisp and enticing thriller because of its technical excellence. But you can't. Technically, it's a mess: if they were after a grainy effect, it gets lost as you see people move in and out of focus; the editing is sloppy and the lighting differs sharply between interiors and exteriors. It isn't messy enough to be embarrassing, just enough to be considered amateurish.

This film might do better business if its producers were to open up their book-keeping to an impartial judge and allow that person to oversee an audience participation contest called: How did these people spend seven million dollars? (The game is already being played by people who feel compelled to see Canadian movies and, to my knowledge, nobody's come up with the right answer.) My hunch is that most of the money went to renting every Lada within a 200-mile radius; but that hunch is predicated on the assumption that it costs more money to rent these cars than to buy them. If you have no trouble understanding the logic of that, then **Final Assignment** may just be the movie for you — and your tax accountant.

Watching **Final Assignment** is not unlike watching the 1969 Montreal Expos: you recognize the game but everything about the way it's being played is bush league. It took the Expos 10 years to begin to offer first-rate entertainment, and perhaps film viewers will have to wait as long. Unfortunately, baseball doesn't aspire to be anything but entertaining, whereas movies could be so much more.

Kevin Tierney

## Final Assignment

**d.** Paul Almond **exec.p.** James Shavick, Arnold Kopelson **p.** Lawrence Hertzog **co-p.** Gail Thomson **d.o.p.** John Coquillon **p.des.** Harry Pottle **sc.** Marc Rosen **story** Gail Thomson **p.super.** Mychèle Boudrias **p.man.** Monique Messier **a.d.** Pedro B. Gandol (1st), Marie-Andrée Vinet, Pierre Poirier (2nd), Blair Roth (3rd), Mireille Goulet (special) **cont.** Suzanne Chiasson-Jonassen **cast.d.** Daniel Hausmann, Barbara Cartwright (asst.) **cast.consult.** Eva Langbord **p.co-ord.** Daniel Louis **unit man.** Francine Forest **loc./unit man.** Jacques Normand **asst. unit man.** Nathalie Moliavko-Visotzky **loc. man.** Michel Veilleux, Cary Ross **p.sec.** Jacqueline Wanner **asst. to p.** Midge Keith, Penny French **asst. to d.** Christopher Wallace **cam.op.** Herbert Smith **cam.asst.** Daniel Jobin (1st), Mathieu Décary (2nd) **2nd unit cam.** Alain Dostie, Daniel Vincelette (asst.) **sd.** Henri Blondeau, Richard Nichol **boom** Normand Mercier, Philippe Planas **gaf.** Buddy Bradley, Kevin O'Connell **best boy** Gerald Proulx **3rd elec.** Arshad Shah, Robert Lapierre **key grip** Michel Chohin, Don Caulfield **asst.grip** Jean Trudeau (1st), Pierre Lapointe (2nd) **stunt co-ord.** Marcel Fournier **stunts** Yves Fournier, Lyne Fournier **sp. efx.** Joseph Elsner **art d.** Jocelyn Joly, René Petit, Raymond Dupuis (asst.), Fernand Durand (asst.) **prop. master** Normand Simpson, Susan Scott (asst.) **set dress.** François Seguin **set props** Maurice Leblanc, Jean-Pierre Laurendeau **prop. buyer** Frances Calder **vehicle co-ord.** Herminio Bihete **p.draughtsman** Dai Moran **head carp.** Claude Simard **cost. des.** Nicoletta Massone **ward.** Nicole Pelletier **dresses** Francesca Chamberland, Paulette Gagnon, Michèle Lafaille **hair** Huguette Roy, Gaétan Noiseux (asst.) **wig specialist** Denis Girard **make-up** Diane

Simard, Lyne Desmarais (asst.), Manon Parent (asst.) **dial. dub. ed.** Robin Leigh **foley sd.** Andy Malcolm **asst. sd. ed.** Tony Currie **sd. rerec.** Gary Bourgeois, Tony Van Den Akker **foley rec.** Jack Heeren **asst. pic. ed.** Jacqueline Carmody, Susan Shanks **themes perf.** Bowkun Trio **p.acct.** Diane Arcand, Muriel Lizé-Pothier, Michéline Trepanier **equip. store keep.** Gilles Béchard **stills** Alan Carruthers **pub.** The Network **unit pub.** Denise Di Novi **stock footage superv.** Graham Seaton **Russian tech. consult.** Elena Baranova, Tomas Shuman **apprent. cam. asst.** Claude-Simon Langlois **apprent. asst. d.** Elvira Rychlak **apprent. asst. sd. ed.** Marta Nielsen **p.a.** Shelley Veinish, Ina Voldar, Pierre Anctil, Gisèle Bolduc, Viateur Castonguay, Michel Emond, Pierre Forest, Steven Manners, Denis Martin, Alain Michaud, Jean-Pierre Sabourin, Michel Veillette **post p.a.** Sandra Kane **l.p.** Geneviève Bujold, Michael York, Burgess Meredith, Colleen Dewhurst, Michelle Mostovoy, Richard Gabourie, Len Doncheff, Alexandra Stewart, Septimius Sever, David McIlwraith, Renato Trujillo, Timothy Webber, John Granik, Jack Fisher, John Grant, Dave Patrick, Rachel Wilkinson, Norman Tabiss, Noel Ross, Larry Schwartz, Gordon Warren, Ian Stephens, Wally Bondarenko, George Juriga, Patrick Peuvion, Mikhail Berkut, Bradford Murdoch, Roman Izbinsky, William Siemienski, Erastia Sever, Elena Baranova, Kim Yaroshevskaya, Alex Dmitriev, Wanda Arleninow, Katya Ladan, Kelly Gallagher, Anna Familiant, Anna Chomsky, Mary Bell, Walter Bolton, Michael Fostady, Tom Kovacs, Jacques Canto, Elizabeth Dufresne, Alexander Maidan, Vlasta Vrana, Morris Goldsmith, Michel Maillot, George Popovich, Michael Mololey, John Brodych, Nicholas Goursky, Paul Zolner, Jorma Lindquist, Robert King, Boris arleninow, Ivan Honstacharov, Abollon Kallaur, Damir Andrei, Neil Affleck, Tony Angelo, Laura Riga, Josée Beauregard, Serge Dobrovlianski, Ragean Gauthier, Huguette Rioux, Jeff Ladenheim, Bill Stewart, Andrew Semple, Claude-Simon Langlois **col.** 35mm **p.c.** Cinema One Films Inc. **running time** 101 min. **dist.** Pan Canadian.

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