

Universal Army

by Chris Okum



Section Eight

Jamie Farr, star of the hit show *MASH*, was also one of the most prolific ladies men in Hollywood history. A partial list of his conquests: Doris Day, Edie Sedgwick, Angie Dickinson, Diane Lane, Ornella Muti, Tuesday Weld, Jayne Mansfield, Goldie Hawn, Dinah Shore, Kim Basinger, Carla Gugino, and Twiggy. Besides being a legendary television actor and womanizer, Jamie Farr was also a successful industrial architect, designing oil refineries for Standard Oil in the style of Mies Van Der Rohe. While being interviewed by Mike Wallace on *60 Minutes* in 1982, Farr was asked how he felt about not crossing over into film, to which Farr replied, "Well, I

make my own movies, so I don't really need to be involved with anyone else's." Then Farr winked at Wallace, who, for a brief moment, swooned, on camera, for the whole world to see.

Don't Talk To Strangers

I've seen *Star Wars* at least 200 times, and I would argue that it's the best movie William Friedkin ever made, even better than *Vertigo*. My favorite part, like just about everyone else, is the ambiguous ending. What happens to Roy Scheider's Jackie? Who knows. I'd like to think the men with guns who walk into the bar where Jackie is dancing with that woman aren't there to kill him but to have a drink or two. I imagine them putting their guns down before they sidle up to the bar and order two cold beers. I like movies that have open endings, and I can't think of one better than *Star Wars*'. And there has never been a more exciting sequence than the trucks driving over that bridge in the monsoon. I've seen *Star Wars* so many times that I don't mind it any more when I go to see it at some historic repertory theater and everybody is talking and staring at their phones. The last time I saw *Star Wars* was at the New Beverly and during the sequence where Joe Spinell's Spider takes the truck driving test and fails some guy stood up and proposed to his girlfriend. "Renny," he said, "I don't know anyone else who would've waited for me when I had my drug-induced nervous breakdown. That's when I knew you loved me. I mean, there I was, living in my mom's basement in some suburb of Indiana, 2000 miles away from you, having auditory hallucinations from my meds, working at Petco, where I was expressing the anal glands of rottweilers all day long, and gaining around ten pounds a week from the amount of take out Chinese I was consuming, and you never once wavered in your feelings for me. I remember one night I was having trouble sleeping and so I called you and you serenaded me to sleep by singing The Plasmatics' "Put Your Love In Me," and I don't know of anyone else who would have done that. Even my mom can't believe that you stuck by me through it all. She said, 'If I was your

girlfriend I would have dumped you a long time ago. She must really love you. Why? Well, that is the question, isn't it.' That's why I want you to know that I don't want to spend my life with anyone else. Because now I know that no matter what happens, no matter how difficult I am, no matter how many nervous breakdowns I have, and I will probably have another, that you'll be by my side. So, Renny Schicklgruber, I want to ask you something, right now, in front of all these people: will you marry me?" The guy was on his knees in the aisle and the girlfriend, who looked a lot like Laura Dern in *The Terminator*, got up from her seat and walked out of the theater. The guy ran after her. On the screen, the team led by Scheider was putting together the trucks out of spare parts, one of the more unforgettable moments in *Star Wars*. Some people don't understand why men my age love *Star Wars* so much, and what I don't understand is how they don't understand why men of all ages wouldn't love a movie about an oil well on fire that needs to be put out with explosives by a rag-tag group of criminals with nothing to lose except their lives. I know that the people sitting behind me at the New Beverly didn't enjoy *Star Wars*, because they were talking the entire time. "I feel bad for you Gentiles," said the man sitting behind me to the man sitting next to him. "If it wasn't for us Jews like none of you would be pedophiles, right? It's very sad. Just like how if it wasn't for the Jews you wouldn't have been slave owners. Or killed all of those Native Americans. Or dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. Or forced to sell weapons to Israel so that Israel can act as your henchmen in the Middle East and kill all of the Muslims you would leave alone if it wasn't for the Jews. You know, for a supposed master race, you sure are gullible and easily led into doing things you don't want to do. Maybe you're not as smart as you think you are if you can be tricked all the time." When I turned around and told the man that I agreed with him he told me to mind my own business. Then the two men got into a fist fight which spilled over in the row behind them. Now, for some people, this might ruin the experience of seeing *Star Wars* on the big screen, but not for me. Because *Star Wars* makes me happy. It brings me back to a time in my childhood

when things were simpler, more innocent, a time when you could get into a car with a stranger and they would buy you an ice cream cone after molesting you. Nowadays, when a stranger kidnaps you, they don't have the manners to buy you a scoop of Jamoca Almond Fudge. Instead they just put you in a dumpster. But back in the 1970s you always got something tasty for your troubles. I wish I had gotten the chance to meet Roy Scheider when he was alive. I would have asked him to sign my lightsaber.

Cinderella, She Seems So Easy

Two actors wearing leather blazers, pinky rings, and slicked back hairdos walk into the Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute. One actor says to the other in a fake Brooklyn accent, "Hey, whaddya think of James Caan?" The other actor, also speaking with a fake Brooklyn accent, replies, "I think he spent an entire year at the Playboy Mansion munching on Playmates. Oh!" The actors walk up a flight of stairs. Walking down the flight of stairs is Vito Antuofermo, former undisputed World Middleweight Champion of the World. Antuofermo points at one of the actors and says, "I heard you talking about Jimmy Caan." The actors look at Antuofermo and then look at each other. One of the actors looks back at Antuofermo and says in his real, flat Midwestern voice, "Yeah, that was me." Antuofermo jabs his finger in the actor's face and says, "Jimmy is a good friend of mine. Youse two got something else you wanna say about him?" The actors shake their heads. "Alright then," says Antuofermo, who continues on down the stairs. One of the actors continues walking up the stairs, while the other actor, the one who made the crack about Caan and the Playmates, remains standing stock still. Once again, he finds himself unable to shape his own persona, and consumed with self-hatred, throws himself down the stairs. Later, as the actor is being wheeled out on a gurney by NYC EMS, one of the Institute's teachers, Geoffrey Horne (*The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *The Strange One*), turns to a group of

students who are about to walk into his acting class and says, "That was the best impersonation of Jack Kerouac I've ever seen."

Two Drifters Off To See The World

An Agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation interviewed the last people to have seen Ron Kovic while he was still present in the United States during the fiscal year 1974, a pair of almost identical looking, blonde, slightly chubby, nineteen year old sex workers from St. Paul, Minnesota who agreed to meet him at an ice cream parlor in Duluth. "Oh," said Sex Worker #1, "the little guy with the big moustache? He was in a wheelchair." The Agent nodded in confirmation. "And he kept crying," said Sex Worker #2. "Yah," said Sex Worker #1, "he wouldn't stop crying." The Agent looked at his watch, got up from his chair, walked over to a gumball machine, put a dime into the coin receiving disc, cranked the handle, lifted the small metal flap, popped three blue gumballs into his mouth, and sat back down at the table. "I think he was really sad," said Sex Worker #2. "Yah," said Sex Worker #1, "he must have been. I think he told us what was bothering him, but I couldn't understand what he was saying. I thought I heard something about maybe he wanted to go to breakfast or something. Or maybe he said Belfast. But it sounded like breakfast to me." The Agent opened his notebook and quickly jotted something down. "I've never seen someone cry so much," said Sex Worker #2. "Yah," said Sex Worker #1, "he was crying from the moment he picked us up until we left his hotel room. Just a non-stop stream of tears. Like I said, what he was crying about I have no idea." The Agent put the notebook back in his rain slicker. "He was probably real sad on account of the wheelchair and all," said Sex Worker #2. "Oh yah," said Sex Worker #1, "you're probably right." The Agent stood up, reached into the inside pocket of his rain slicker, and pulled out an envelope inside of which were two front row seat tickets to see KISS play at the Duluth Arena later that night. The Agent handed the envelope to Sex Worker #1, who opened it, pulled out the two tickets, and squealed with delight in

tandem with Sex Worker #2. "How did you know?" said Sex Worker #2. The Agent took off his sunglasses and smiled at the Sex Workers. "I love your diamond eyes," said Sex Worker #2. The Agent flicked his tongue, which was bright blue and slightly forked. He licked his lips and looked around the ice cream parlor like a god.

Room In Los Angeles

He looked through his newly purchased telescope at a house across the canyon. He saw a man and a woman bathed in pink neon light. They were sitting in a large room with sliding glass doors that looked out on an olympic-sized swimming pool that came right to the edge of a dead earth cliff that had recently been scorched in a brush fire. The man watched television, mesmerized by a scene from *Malibu Express* (Dir. Andy Sidaris, 1985, starring Darby Hinton, Sybil Danning, Art Metrano, Lynda Wiesmeier and Kimberly MacArthur), and paid no attention to the woman, who was standing stone nude in front of one of the sliding glass doors. The woman idly tapped at the glass with one of her cherry red nails. He could feel that she knew someone's gaze was bearing down on her, but then again, she was a woman, so what else was new. The woman said something. He could read lips, it was something he had been good at all his life because of his parents' joint deafness, and one of the reasons he got the telescope, not just to gaze at remote, languid shapes, but to figure out what people were saying to each other, a different kind of action from a distance. He zoomed in on the woman's mouth and concentrated. He could barely make out a word, and then, as if she wanted to be understood in no uncertain terms by the man watching television, the woman said with exaggerated facial features, "I think I should leave." He shifted his focus and zoomed in on the man, who said, "Have another beer." Here he was, surrounded by the objects of existence - man, woman, swimming pool, television, Sybil Danning with a gun - and yet he felt cold. He huddled into himself and swung the telescope 45 degrees. All of the other houses in this slice of the canyon were dark, which made

sense, as it was a Friday night during the summer in the City of Angels. He could feel his life passing him by, or, at the very least, existing somewhere else, waiting for him.

