

## Relentless ★★

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**Year of Release:** 1989

Review by Randy Parker

**Country:** USA

**Verdict:** Skip It

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The newspaper add for *Relentless* read: "Killers aren't born. They're made." Likewise, lousy movies aren't born; they're made—and director William Lustig has made one. In a sense, *Relentless* is only half bad—the half with Judd Nelson portraying Buck Taylor, a homicidal maniac who's murdering people selected at random from the phone.

Screenwriter Jack Robinson seems to think he can throw in some flashbacks of Buck's childhood and call it character psychology; I call it superficial B.S. We're supposed to sympathize with Buck because his authoritarian father made him fire guns at age five. But as soon as he starts committing the gruesome murders, any sympathy we had for him immediately flies right out the window. Buck is despondent because the police academy has rejected him on the grounds that he's "psychologically unfit." Call me an optimist, but there must be a healthier way to cope with rejection than by killing people.

According to the production notes, Nelson prepared for the role by reading books about serial killings. I would have guessed he prepared by watching *Night of the Living Dead* 500 times because all he does in the role is walk around like a zombie, complete with bags under his eyes and greasy, disheveled hair. As a psychological character study, *Relentless* is about as fresh and satisfying

as moldy bread.

As a buddy-buddy comedy, on the other hand, *Relentless* has more to offer. The movie is nearly saved by the humorous repartee between Robert Loggia and Leo Rossi who play the investigating homicide detectives. Rossi is an earnest ex-New York patrolman who has been promoted to detective in L.A. His new partner, Loggia, is a seasoned veteran preparing to retire. *Relentless* has fun with the clash between Rossi's anxious, New York personality and Loggia's laid back California lifestyle. Loggia seems indifferent to the murder victims, showing more interest in the real estate value of their condos. Rossi, on the other hand, is almost too eager to collect clues; he thinks he's Sherlock Holmes.

To a certain extent, the movie makes up for its clichéd story line with its satirical depiction of the L.A.P.D. The clever one-liners sprinkled throughout the film keep the mood from becoming too somber.

Ultimately, *Relentless* is done in by its utter predictability. At the climax, for example, Buck Taylor threatens to kill Rossi's family; now where have you seen that before? *Relentless* shows few, if any, signs of imagination or creativity, but that shouldn't stop you from catching it on cable some night while you're eating last week's leftovers.