The Falcon and the Snowman, a John Schlesinger film now playing at the Sack Cheri and Sack Somerville.

In the five months that I have been an arts editor for the Tech I have verified one general trend: the more a movie is publicized the worse it probably is. I have never encountered a movie that was pushed as hard as this one, although Dune runs a close second place. Two separate advertising agencies seem to be handling this movie and I received numerous memos from somewhere in Wisconsin (reason yet to be determined) informing me of its "special impact on college students."

Keep in mind for the rest of my review that I went expecting the worst. It wasn't quite that bad, but it came close. I found a respectable spy flick with a minimum of plot — supposedly based on a true incident.

The Falcon and the Snowman tells the story of Christopher Boyce, son of an ex-FBI man. Boyce becomes disgusted with US covert actions which he learns about accidentally through his communications job. He then enlists the aid of his drug dealer friend, Daulton Lee, to sell the secret codes he uses at work to the USSR.

The premise is improbable, but as far as I can gather from the press materials I received, it is supposed to be improbable.

Sean Penn plays the part of Daulton Lee admirably. But then Sean Penn plays any character heavily involved with drugs admirably. Daulton Lee was a drug dealer — Sean Penn has mastered the character.

Timothy Hutton is the other "big name" in this movie. He doesn't shine in the role of Christopher Boyce, a mailroom clerk turned spy, but I have no other complaints with his performance.

There was an important message lying just under the surface of the movie, but it never was really brought up. It's just as well, since the message might have been better placed into the McCarthyist 50s than the Deterrent 80s. As far as I can tell, the message is supposed to be, "The Soviets are no better or worse than we are."

The story fits the current events well with the recent Space Shuttle scandal making headlines. A good spy might be needed to find out what's really going on up there...

It probably will take a good spy to figure out why Orion Pictures is able to stay in business. Perhaps hype is all it takes to make a movie a hit today. If people would wait for the reviews to come out before plopping down $4.50 for a mediocre movie, maybe the producers would be forced to change their tack.

Ronald E. Becker

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