

## 50 MPH: EPISODE 38

### “THE CINEMA OF 1994” (with Jonathan Foster)

Transcript (01:36:03)



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**KRIS TAPLEY**

This is *50 MPH*!

[INTRO MUSIC]

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Pop quiz, hotshot!

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

There’s a bomb on a bus.

**JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)**

You’re deeply nuts, you know that?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

**SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)**

Stay on or get off?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

If it drops below fifty...

**SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)**

Stay on or get off?!

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

...it blows up.

**ALAN RUCK (as “Stephens”)**

Oh, darn.

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

What do you do?

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

What do you do?!

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

What do you do?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I’m your host, Kris Tapley, and you’re listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont’s 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don’t forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let’s hit the road!

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Hello, folks, and welcome back as we continue through the landscape of legacy as it pertains to *Speed*. At this point, we’ve given you a soup-to-nuts account of the film’s making. We’ve documented its release and immediate impact, and we’re going to start talking about its lingering impact over the next several episodes as we speed – hehehe – toward the finish line of *50 MPH*. Last week, you heard Anne Thompson and myself discussing the Oscars of March 1995, which awarded, ostensibly, the cream of the crop of 1994 movies. Today, we’re going to widen that lens even more and talk about the full scope of 1994 cinema with my guest. He’s the host of the podcast *The Worst Part of My Favorite Movie*, but more importantly, he’s my friend of nearly 25 years: Jonathan Foster. Jonathan, thank you for coming on, man.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Thank you so much for having me. I’m a big fan. You know that? And

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And no, my wife and I did not name our son after Jonathan, as anyone who will have heard episode 25 of this podcast will very well know. But who the hell is Jonathan Foster? OK, well, I just plugged his podcast, which you should check out. It’s a great angle for his guests to talk about their favorite movies. But Jonathan is one of the most personal guests I’ve had on this show, because we went to film school together. We started in 1999, which was an amazing year to be embarking on a film school education, let me tell you. And today, among other things, Jonathan is a projectionist, and in fact, part of, I would say, an exclusive group of specialized individuals. Chances are, if you caught 70mm runs of *The Hateful Eight*, *Dunkirk* or, most recently, *Oppenheimer*, Jonathan might have been up there in the booth. He travels when his skills are called upon, and that is a dying art and dwindling workforce, and we appreciate him for that. Also, other than my wife, Jonathan is the first person to hear new episodes of *50 MPH* when I put the rough edits together. So, I’m very grateful to him for that. And there’s something else about Jonathan, that is formative for me, and I’m pretty sure he knows this. Sometime, I would say early 2000, at film school, I’m hanging out with Jonathan and he’s got this notebook of Oscar predictions. And I’m,

like, “What the fuck is this?” Never heard of it. Never thought of doing something like this. I was aware of the Oscars, obviously, and I’m looking at this thing, and I’m, like, “Steven Soderbergh is not going to get nominated twice.” I guess this would have been 2001, right?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

How’s this – I’ve never heard of that! I mean, I didn’t know – Jonathan followed things like the DGA awards and stuff enough to know what was going to happen, and I just wasn’t that guy yet. And, you know, obviously, anyone who knows my work knows that I eventually soon fell into that world of fan sites and Oscar predictions and whatnot, moved out to LA, got involved with it out here on a more professional level, quote, unquote, I guess, became a journalist, went back to grad school for journalism, and I have a career – I had a career – at doing that, in part because of Jonathan. So, I don’t know whether to thank him for that or not. But either way, it’s his fault as much as it’s mine, so, yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, well, first of all, I’m happy to take credit for that. You were my go-to. Eventually, that’s how I won, like, office Oscar pools. I would just read your work. You were particularly good at, then called the Foreign Language Film category. I remember being, like, “Well, if Tapley says that, then that’s what I’m going to go with.” But yeah, I have a memory in film school, trying to convince you – because I believed it. You know, I was very arrogant. You know, I believed everything I said. I tried to convince you that *Monkeybone* would get nominated for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, and you just kind of looked at me, like, “OK, sure.” But you didn’t go with it. And you were right not to, so.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I don’t remember that. I don’t remember that movie very well, other than it was not good. But yeah, man, I sat under your learning tree in those early years. So, I owe it all to you, my friend.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Oh, thank you. I also am apologetic.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yes. I mean, it’s become an interesting world, the awards coverage landscape, to say the least. More to the point of today’s proceedings, Jonathan would tell you, and I’m going to let him tell you, that 1994 was a special year for him when it came to his budding interest in cinema. So, Jonathan, take it away from there and we’ll dive into the topic for today in just a minute.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, I kind of tell people that it was the year I came of age at the movies. I turned 13 in 1994. That was the last half of my seventh-grade year of school, first half of eighth grade. I was 12 for most of the year; I turned 13 at the end of July, you know? So, no social life really to speak of outside of going to school, but, you know, at home, very close, very loving, very stable family, which is, you know – what a blessing, what a privilege to be able to say that, but, you know, in the absence of drama, you know, we didn't – I didn't move. My heart didn't get broken. The big events of my life in 1994 were things like, oh, we went to D.C. in the summer. I got contacts. I had had this awful pair of glasses and I got contacts. My brother started college in the fall, and that was a big deal because, you know, that was a very emotional thing for us, because we were so aware of him being gone. So, in addition to those things, if you want to call them, like, the plot points of my life, the memorable plot points of my life would have been, you know, my growing relationship with the movies. And, you know, back then that involved, like, a steady diet of reading *Entertainment Weekly* and paying attention to Siskel and Ebert and my own local critic at the *Charlotte Observer*, Lawrence Toppman. I watched a ton of *Entertainment Tonight* and the E! channel, back when they concern themselves with covering the entertainment industry. You know, there was that show *Coming Attractions*. There was that show on, like, I think it was Discovery Channel, *Movie Magic*, which, you know, covered special effects. And then, you know, like you, I watched a lot of those *HBO First Looks*. But the relative kind of newness of my obsession meant that almost everything had a sense of discovery to it. So, you know, there were certain movie-going experiences that take on the significance of kind of these autobiographical markers, because, you know, at that age, you know, I'm just soaking everything up like a sponge. And here's one very, like, silly example of that. It was April 22, 1994. I remember that date for some reason. But the movie *Bad Girls* came out, that western that, you know, had, like, Madeline Stowe, Mary Stuart Masterson, Andie MacDowell and Drew Barrymore. My brother and I decided to go see this movie, mostly to hear the score. You know, at the same time I was becoming interested in movies, I also kind of had a growing obsession with film scores. Jerry Goldsmith scored *Bad Girls*. He was an early favorite. And so, often, who scored a movie would sometimes dictate what we saw. So, anyway, we get to the box office. My brother goes up to buy the tickets. They tell him that you have to be 18 to buy tickets to an R-rated movie, which is not true. He was 17. He could buy an R-rated movie ticket. He was actually weeks away from turning 18. But we're there. We have to figure out something else. So, we decided to see, of all things, *The Hudsucker Proxy*, which, you know, I had kind of read about. I knew what it was. But I had never seen a Coen brothers movie. That was the first Coen brothers movie I ever saw. And we both liked it. I liked it. But, you know, seeing it, it was like a door was opened and I was very excited to walk through it, and the sense of discovery there – you know, it's not as if it was, like, shaping my tastes, necessarily, but it was, like, "What is this thing and where will it lead me next?" I still pretty much liked everything I saw, you know? It's not like I was seeking out experimental, underground cinema after that or anything, but it was a formative experience, and there were a number of instances like that just in 1994. You know, this is a *Speed* podcast, obviously, and *Speed* was another big one for me like that. And it's kind of funny, because at a certain point, past a certain point, in your life, those instances, for me, anyway, have become more and more rare. But yeah, you know, the

way I felt in '94 watching, you know, *The Hudsucker Proxy*, is similar to, you know, as a jaded 40-year-old, how I felt when I finally saw, like, *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* for the first time, or Claudia Weill's movie *Girlfriends*, or King Vidor's *Street Scene*. Like, it still happens, and when it does, it's so exciting because it seems to expand and deepen your appreciation of movies.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Totally. It is a shame those moments seem fewer and farther apart. Part of that is just getting older and cynical. But *The Hudsucker Proxy*, that was an HBO movie for me. I'll just talk about '94 for me, briefly. I was – I think I said this when I was a guest on your podcast. '94 was the first year that I saw more than one movie in the theater, because prior to that, I was just, like – my family, we weren't big movie theater people. We watched movies at home a lot, but we saw, like, maybe one movie a year, growing up, and then '94, I saw *Speed* in the theater. I saw *The Mask*, and I think *The Mask* was, like, the first time I went, like, my parents dropped me off, like, I saw a movie by myself, you know?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

That's a big deal.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. I saw, you know – and speaking of *The Mask*, Jim Carrey was a big deal for me that year, so, that was kind of part of what was getting me in there. But yeah, I saw multiple movies in the theater that year. And not some of the ones that you might expect. Like, I didn't see *Pulp Fiction* in the theater. I didn't see – I mean, you know. I don't know if I would have been too young to go see *Pulp Fiction* at that time in the theater. It feels like something you kind of, at our age then, you kind of discovered on VHS, but maybe you saw it in the theater. I didn't see, like, what, *Forrest Gump* in the theater. I saw that on VHS later. I did see *The Lion King*. I did see *True Lies*, you know? And we're going to talk about everything here, but I'm just giving a quick rundown. And it was just a multiple-movies year for me, and I guess in some ways, I owe the whole year for that. Because, for whatever reason, before then, I just wasn't as interested in seeing multiple things in the theater. And because of that, I've always just loved the movies of 1994. Did you see *Pulp Fiction* in the theater?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I did see *Pulp Fiction* in the theater. I didn't see it until it was back out for Oscar nominations in '95. But I loved it. My dad took me to see it, and he still remembers this. He still brings us up. He apologized to me after taking me to see it because, you know, the language is what it is. And I was just, like, "It's okay, Dad. You know, I hear that at school."

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He's, like, "What??"

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. You know, what you would expect from, you know, a parent. Rightly so, I think. But yeah, it was an electrifying experience. You know, by that point, it's funny, I was probably already, like, Mr. Moviegoer, jaded, kind of. But it was still thrilling.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I was building to that, I guess. I wasn't quite there yet. Certainly, by the time, Heat and whatnot rolled around, and by then I'm going to Blockbuster and, you know, renting, like, everything that I'm supposed to see, you know? We did the – I guess '98 is when the AFI list came out. But prior to that, you know, you're well aware of *Goodfellas* and *Apocalypse Now* and *2001* and just the canon, and so, certainly around this time, I'm, you know, dipping a toe into all that. But, you know, I was telling Jonathan before we started here, I have no game plan, no roadmap for this. It's just going to be a holistic discussion of the entire year. I figure, you know, we're going to bounce around a lot, but since we just came off with this episode with Anne talking about the Oscars, certainly the biggest movie of the year in terms of box office and in terms of Oscars, and those things don't go hand in hand anymore, is *Forrest Gump*. So, I figure we'll start there, fan out from there. I don't think there's anything else particularly deep to say about *Forrest Gump*. But it is interesting. I think that's a key point, that the movies that are the biggest popularly, and the biggest Oscar-wise, it never happens anymore, except this last year. Obviously, *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie* kind of brought that back, which is sort of exciting. But it is a note that just, you know, the public and the Academy have not seen eye-to-eye like they did on *Forrest Gump* in a long time, so.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, it's funny. I ended up, just for prep to talk to you, going back and reading a lot of coverage of movies from 1994, specifically from the pages of *Entertainment Weekly*. Your guest last week was Anne Thompson. I read so much – a ton of Anne Thompson's writing, in order to-

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Poor girl forgot that's what she was doing at the time.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

I know. It's crazy, because she was all over the pages of that magazine. And you're right. You mentioned *Forrest Gump* being huge that year. It was. It was huge. 1994 was actually – and I had to be reminded of this – was the biggest year for movies ever. The previous record had actually been set the year before, 1993, largely because of *Jurassic Park*. But in 1994, you had two movies gross over \$300 million, *Forrest Gump* and *The Lion King*, and in '93, the ticket sales were over \$5 billion. And in '94, it surpassed that. Still in the \$5 billion range, but more, I think by \$200 million more. The top 10 films of that year all grossed \$100 million dollars or more, and that was very much, you know, the standard by which a film could justifiably be called a blockbuster. Back then, that was a relatively exclusive club. And it was the first year – this is funny. It was the first year that a studio made a billion dollars or more in ticket sales, that studio being Disney. It's funny because now, certain movies are billion-dollar grossers, but that was the first year that a studio made a billion dollars and more.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Across a wide range of product as well, right? I mean, you've got – because *Pulp Fiction* would have been a part of that, yeah?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, they owned – they had bought Miramax, I believe, the year before.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

OK, yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

So, they had Miramax. They had Touchstone. They had Hollywood Pictures. They had Caravan Pictures, I believe, was them. But their two biggest ones were *The Lion King* and then *The Santa Clause* with Tim Allen.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Ah, yes. *The Santa Clause*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

So, that accounted for a lot of it. Now, here's the crazy part, and I want to ask you. So, it was a big year for movies, obviously. Was it a good year for movies? You know, your Twitter bio says you're an unapologetic '90s nostalgist. You've got this *Speed* podcast. One of the biggest movies in '94. Was '94 a good year for movies?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I mean – obviously, I know where you're going with this. If you're asking me that in a vacuum, yes, I think it was, because I love so many movies from that year. I mean, to me, it's, like, banger after banger. And that partly could be nostalgia, but like, I'm looking at my Letterboxd list right now and it's just, like, I like a lot of these movies. I just saw *Legends of the Fall* again a couple of weeks ago and I was, like, "Holy fuck, I wish they still made movies like this." I mean, I understand maybe some people don't like that movie, for whatever reason, but it's kind of interesting to see a movie and literally, in real time, watch a movie star take shape in Brad Pitt. And so, anyway, that's just an example, but, like, yeah, I'm looking at the list and I like a lot of these movies, so, I would say yes, good year for movies.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, I would agree with you 100%. Now, every year – my feeling is that every year, the way it, you know, kind of shakes out, most movies are bad. But you kind of judge a year by its strength, I think, and, you know, when you look back, we tend to telescope these things. But in 1994, at the end of 1994, the viewpoint – the studios' viewpoint and the critics' viewpoint – was that 1994 had been a pretty weak year for movies. Not a good year for movies. And I'll tell you why. Here's where they agreed. There were too many movies and too many bad movies. Now, their definitions of bad movies differed. For a studio, obviously, a bad movie is one that loses them money, and there were a bunch of

those in 1994. I found a quote from the distribution chief at Paramount. So, keep in mind, this is the studio that released *Forrest Gump*, the biggest movie of the year. He says, "Two out of 10 pictures are hits. The other eight lose money." So, I thought it would be fun to – you know, this is a *Speed* podcast – to look at that statement through the lens of 20th Century Fox, who released *Speed*. So, their slate that year, chronologically, was as follows. And I imagine some listeners will hear these titles and go, "Oh, yeah, I remember that movie," or some might even go, "I've never heard of that movie." Either one would be understandable. But you tell me, Kris, if you've seen them, or whatever your impressions are of them, and then I'll kind of tell you, you know, how they did? So, the first one, *Sugar Hill*. Have you seen *Sugar Hill*?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yes.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK, so, *Sugar Hill* was part of the screenwriter's so-called Harlem trilogy. The guy that wrote *New Jack City*-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*Juice*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, no, it was *New Jack City* and-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Not *Juice*. *New Jack City*, yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

-*Above the Rim*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*Above the Rim*, yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Same screenwriter, and that that was his unofficial Harlem trilogy. A Wesley Snipes movie. What do you think of that movie?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I actually like it. Last year I actually did a deep dive into all of those movies, and a lot of them hold up to me. And you're talking about Barry Michael Cooper, who I actually follow on Twitter.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Oh, cool.

**KRIS TAPLEY**



Good follow. But I liked that movie. I can see why it would not play widely, though.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, well, it opened in February. It opened at number three, and Fox seemed pretty pleased with that. I think, you know, it made \$5.7 million that weekend, and from what I can tell, that was kind of a pleasant surprise. It fell out of the top 10 list in its third week, but I think all told, like, it did OK. Like, that's the impression I get. That movie that movie did OK. So, you know, OK, it recouped its money, let's say. The next one was *The Chase*, which you've talked about.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Let's explain. That's Wesley Snipes, too.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Wesley Snipes in *Sugar Hill*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

So, Wesley Snipes coming off of *Demolition Man*. You know, he's really coming into his own, if not just fully formed as a movie star. So, it's trading on that.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Whatever it's pulling in.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, Wesley Snipes was seen as, you know, a bankable actor, and Fox gave him credit for, like, "Hey, that's why this movie did even as well as it did in February." And then the next one was *The Chase*, the Charlie Sheen, Kristy Swanson movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Love *The Chase*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Oh, do you, really?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Love *The Chase*. That was an HBO staple. I mean, it's not a good movie, but I love it.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I saw it for the first time this year.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

OK, yeah. I'm sure it's terrible, then.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, you know, it's unfair of me to do this. But, you know, I kept thinking of *The Sugarland Express*, which, you know, like, one of the great directorial debuts of all time. Probably unfair to compare *The Chase* to that. But it reminded me of, like, if *Sugarland Express* were louder and crasser and, you know, made for the MTV generation. More obnoxious. That's what *The Chase* is.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I don't remember any fucking in the driver's seat in *Sugarland Express*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, I guess there is the scene where they're in that kind of, I guess, trailer park, watching the movie. It's not a love scene.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But not while they're like, speeding down the road.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

No, no, no. It's not as reckless as it is in *The Chase*. Also, I think *The Chase* had a slanted title treatment on the posters, and graphic design very similar to *Speed* to connote, you know, momentum, I guess.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, there you go.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Anyway, *The Chase* flopped. You know, not a popular movie. Then came *Bad Girls*, the all-female western that I just mentioned. That flopped. Here's another one I think that you might – this might be a HBO Kris Tapley movie from, like, eighth grade: *PCU*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, absolutely. Big fan.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK, I still haven't seen *PCU*, but it did not do well. I can tell you that much.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Not shocking, right? I mean, there's no stars in that. There's no, like – there's no hook to really-

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

No stars, and that was kind of a trend in the early part of the year. There was, like, this panic, because, like, Gen X wasn't showing up to the movies. You know, *Reality Bites* kind of underperformed. You had, like, *With Honors* and *Threesome* and *PCU* and these movies that were kind of, you know, more or less targeted to, quote, unquote, "Gen X." Nobody liked that term. They didn't want to be, you know, marketed to. They

didn't want to be thought of as one, you know, monolith, and they weren't showing up. And there was there was a panic because of that. *PCU* was one of those films. And just, you know, nobody went to go see it. But their next film came out June 10, 1994: *Speed*. Big hit, obviously. A genuine blockbuster, and certainly the movie that Fox released that year with the biggest profit margin. There was one movie that made more money, but the profit margin wasn't as big. We'll get to that in a second. And, you know, we've talked about *Speed* enough on this podcast.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Not nearly enough. Well, let me slow you down, though.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Sure.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

You're dealing in Fox. You're dealing in the bottom of the barrel here. I mean, we've heard Bill Mechanic say that when he came into the company, there was *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *Speed* and everything else was a waste of time. So, they were kind of, like, beginning to turn things around in '94, which is just worth noting. I mean, whatever was going on with Fox before then, it was not producing dividends. And so, it's just, you know – I just want to point that out, that I don't know that Fox would be indicative of the studios' success as a whole that year, but maybe you'll prove me wrong. But it's just interesting that it was, you know, the bottom-of-the-barrel studio in 1994, and then, within a couple of years, they would become the top studio.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, there had been an increase in production at most studios around this time, and that ended up being part of the problem. There was just this glut of product that all these studios had being released, a lot of stuff that was just, like, very similar. I'm guessing because of the success of, oh, *Dances with Wolves* and the first *City Slickers* and *Unforgiven*, like, there were, in the span of four months in 1994, there were six westerns or western-adjacent movies. And, you know, not all of these are – like, *Lightning Jack* was one of them. *Bad Girls* was one of them. *City Slickers II*, *The Cowboy Way*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

The Cowboy Way.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And then *Wyatt Earp*. You know, like, it was a bunch of movies like that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I like *Wyatt Earp*, by the way.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I know. I heard you mention that last week.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I'm a fan.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

We'll talk more about that in a second, because that was one that got pointed to a lot as part of the problem.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And, you know, the only western that did anything in 1994 was *Maverick*. So, you know, like, one movie out of, you know, however many hits, but there were a bunch of westerns. There were five baseball movies released in 1994, which strikes me as a lot of baseball movies, but none of them, you know, did especially well except for *Angels in the Outfield*, which was Disney.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That's the only one I can remember.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, well, there was *Little Big League*-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*The Sandlot*. Was that the year before?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, that was '93. There was *Little Big League*. Here, I've got a list of them.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*Cobb*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

*Cobb* was one. *Angels in the Outfield*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*Cobb* was an HBO movie for me. Weird movie. That's the reason that Tommy Lee Jones was bald at the Oscars when he won his Oscar.

**JONATHAN FOSTER.**

That's right. He had shaved his head. *Major League II* and *The Scout* were the others.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And then there's a curious amount of baseball played in *3 Ninjas Kick Back*, which, for a movie that's about martial arts, has a lot a lot of baseball in it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Just so people understand why this guy has such a weird, deep knowledge of '94 movies, could you please explain to them your current ongoing project?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, so, this is this is insane. You know, I'm not the first person to do anything like this. But it's nonetheless insane. In fact, our friend, Chad Hartigan, when I said I was going to do this, he was, like, "Is this a cry for help?" And I was, like, "It might be." But, you know, so stamped by 1994, by that year in movies, you know, I'll be scrolling through Netflix or any of those sites and, you know, trying to find something to watch like everybody does, and I, you know, just scroll past all these acclaimed, interesting new movies, and then my eye catches something like *The Client* or something, and, you know, my mind goes "Hm, maybe I should watch that." And, OK, to be clear, I've seen *The Client*. I've seen it more than once. I don't even think *The Client* is a particularly good movie. But for whatever reason, you know, that's the one that attracts my attention. And I see people say stuff like that all the time on my Twitter. The thing about 1994 for me is that that attraction extends even to movies like *Car 54, Where Are You?*-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh my God.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

-which, you know, was an Orion release. Orion had gone bankrupt in the early-90s. There were a bunch of movies that just got shelved, and several of them came out in 1994, you know? And I've just got, like – I have a sense memory of that movie coming out. I remember it being reviewed in *Entertainment Weekly*. I remember learning about Orion and its bankruptcy back in those days, and for whatever reason, I want to see it. And it's, you know, in some way that I don't fully understand, you know, I think it's something more than nostalgia. I don't know what else it could be. But I'm closing some kind of loop by watching *Car 54, Where Are You?* And you mentioned at the top of the show, we started film school in 1999. People love talking about '99, for great reason. It's a very good year. I like that year, too. But I'm not interested in seeing whatever the equivalent of *Car 54, Where Are You?* is from 1999. And I'm not even sure what that would – like, *Dudley Do-Right*, maybe? I don't know. But I got it in my head that I would watch every movie that was eligible for Oscar consideration from 1994. Every year, the Academy sends out a reminder list to their members saying, you know – and that's what the nominations are culled from. If it's not on that list, it's ineligible for Oscars. So, that year, there were 249 movies eligible. I have so far – I started this last year – I've so far watched 122 titles. That leaves me with 127 more to go.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Wow.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

So, yeah, it's quite a project and, you know, like, when I watch *3 Ninjas Kick Back*, am I, like – do I regret coming up with this plan? It's, like, yeah, maybe. I'm having a lot of fun doing it at the same time.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, first of all, how many? Two hundred what?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Two hundred forty-nine total titles.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Because I'm just curious. I just pulled up the list of 2019 eligible titles, because that's the last, let's say, normal year in movie-going. Three hundred forty-four films were eligible that year. I actually thought there might have been more. I wonder if there has been more, randomly, since then. 2022 eligible.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I saw a stat from 1994 Leonard Klady, who worked at *Variety*-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Klady.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Oh, Klady. Sorry.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Rest in peace.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Oh, that's too bad.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

That said, there were, like, more than 400 movies released in 1994. You know, so, it's nice to have those guardrails in place. Like, I'm not going to – you know, doing the reminder list spares me from having to watch, like, *It's Pat*, the movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That wasn't eligible?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, no, it was not eligible.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Wow.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I think it basically only played in, like, Kansas and Seattle. They so dumped it. They knew what they had and then they just put it in some small markets. I think it was Julia Sweeney, actually, who was, like, "I'm from Seattle. At least release it in Seattle."

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Wow.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

But it didn't play, you know, in qualifying places.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Julia Sweeney, who attended the *Speed* premiere with Quentin Tarantino,

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

There you go.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

There are photos. Yeah, I just wanted to just wave the flag and make sure everybody understood, why does this fucking guy know so much about '94 movies? And this is why. He's going through all of them. But just to move back to what you were saying. So, what were we saying? I mean, we're basically saying that by and large, people thought it was a bad year for movies, and studios were saying that, mostly movies lost money versus movies that made money, which is, again, an interesting thing to say in the biggest year, as you said, for movies, up until that time. And critics, I just assume, say there were a ton of bad movies? Is that what it boils down to?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, sort of. So, critics agreed there were too many bad movies, but they also looked at stuff that was successful and were disappointed, and I found two quotes that kind of will frame this for us. Gene Siskel opened his piece about his favorite films of the year by writing – he wrote this: "The year's most significant film? No, it isn't *Forrest Gump*. It's *The Flintstones*. If Hollywood can successfully market that level of junk and gross more than \$100 million domestically, why aim higher?" And then he goes on to say, "It's been said similarly before in other circumstances, we get the movies we deserve." So, I think you know, critics kind of process the year that way. You know, there's another telling quote Kenneth Turan wrote at the end of the year: "That something called *Dumb and Dumber* might be the hit of the moment certainly tells you the direction in which Hollywood is pointing."

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Which is bullshit. I remember *Dumb and Dumber* just catching all that shit, and it's a brilliant movie.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I like it a lot, too. I have rewatched it for this, and here's what's interesting. We're going to talk about Jim Carrey more in a second, but, to me what's interesting about *Dumb and Dumber*, and one of the reasons I think it endures – his default comic persona for basically all the '90s was, like, being an obnoxious jerk. Like, that's what *Ace Ventura* is. That's what *The Mask* is. Like, in most scenes he's in, he's the antagonist in that scene. Like, you know, you may disagree with me here, but, like, when I rewatched *Ace Ventura* this year, I was, like, I related the most to, like, Tone Loc in those scenes. It's just, like, "I'm just trying not to get pummeled by this guy's schtick in these scenes. I'm just trying to survive this comedy." The difference with *Dumb and Dumber* is that he's basically playing just a lovesick buffoon, and that level of, like, being an antagonist and obnoxious hell is not there. I mean, he has scenes where that comes out, but for the most part, it's a really sweet performance and it's funny to think of that as against type, like, yeah, it fits in because it's, like, "dumb," quote, unquote, character, a "dumb," quote, unquote, comedy. But there's, like, a sweetness there that's not really – you know, it's not there in *Batman Forever*. It's not there in *Ace Ventura 2*. It's not there in *The Cable Guy*. You know, what people go to see *Liar Liar* for in '97 is him being the big, obnoxious jerk again, telling the truth. Although, that movie, you know – he's sweet in that movie, as well.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Ultimately.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

But, to me, that's one reason why *Dumb and Dumber* endures, and, you know, why, in my eyes, it's the most successful of those movies of his from 1994.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And it's also – can I just say the obvious – it's fucking hilarious.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

It's very funny, yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I mean, the comedy just works.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And it's funny you mention *The Flintstones*, by the way. That's actually one of the movies that I watched again in the lead-up here, just for whatever reason. It was on Netflix or something. And I had that VHS, too. I don't know why. It's not a good movie, obviously. Like, it's bad. But, it's product, and it was well-marketed. And for what it is, a movie based on a cartoon of *The Flintstones*, it looked good. Like, the production



design and stuff is kind of fun in the movie. The story is terrible. What they kind of chose to be the vehicle for telling a *Flintstones* story was bad, and it's just – it gets a lot of spotlight when it comes to just talking about bad movies in '94. I'm looking at Janet Maslin's review of *Speed* and, you know, she calls it out at the top, too. She says, "At the time of year when Hollywood traditionally bludgeons its audience back into the stone age," and then in parentheses, "sobering statistic: the witless *Flintstones* grossed as much in its first weekend as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* has grossed in the United States in three months – you can still pick your poison." And then she goes on to say that *Speed* is sort of a quote, unquote "brainless" movie that you don't have to check your brain at the door, kind of a thing. So, anyway, it is definitely a whipping boy when it comes to bad movies that year.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, and they really spent a fortune marketing – Universal did – marketing *The Flintstones*. You know, it had been at ShoWest in March of that year, along with *The Mask* and *True Lies* and even *Forrest Gump*, and the movies that people wanted to stay away from that summer were *The Flintstones* and *True Lies*. They just wanted to stay out of their way because they thought they would get clobbered. And I read – I don't know what the original release date might have been – but I read that even *City Slickers II* positioned themselves on June 10 as a way to stay out of *The Flintstones'* way, and obviously that didn't bode well for them-

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

No.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

-with *Speed* coming out.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, so, *Flintstones*, horrible movie indicative of, I guess, some of the stuff that people are talking about, but it's just wild to me. Like, I guess I can understand, contemporaneously, why critics would feel the way they felt. I would be curious if they still feel that way, not that like movies like *The Flintstones* are suddenly good. But I wonder if the good movies just kind of would stand out in hindsight in such a way that makes the year feel better or something. I mean, you kind of take the good with the bad.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, I wonder that as well. And going through this project, like, yeah, there's a ton of bad movies. I've watched a ton of bad movies. But then I watch, you know, *Hoop Dreams*, and it's just, like, "OK." Like, in a year where *Hoop Dreams* is out, in a year where *Quiz Show* is out, which was one – *Quiz Show* was one of those other formative experiences for me in '94. Like, I've always loved *Quiz Show*. Like, in a year where *Quiz Show* was there. I haven't rewatched it for this project yet, but I know *Pulp Fiction*, a year of *Pulp Fiction*, in the year of *Ed Wood*, like, how do you see that list of movies and then go, "Eh, It's a wash"?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. My three favorite movies are part of that Disney, you know, grouping, too, by the way: *Pulp Fiction*, *The Lion King* and *Ed Wood*. I mean, keeping *Speed* out of it. But those are, you know, top three, probably, for me that year.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. Have you shown your son – I think you probably have – *The Lion King*?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I was going to say, “No, I have not shown him *Pulp Fiction* yet.” That was an early movie for him, actually. *Moana* and *The Lion King* were the first two movies that he saw, like, front to back and actually would watch them.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Nice.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And, you know, *The Lion King* is just – it goes down so fucking well. I mean, it’s like *Hamlet* distilled, right? And, you know, it’s like 80 minutes or something. Just, you know, tight. And as I said last week, I mean, I think it should have been a Best Picture nominee straight up.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

So, that was the first movie Disney – the first animated movie Disney had released in the summer since 1986.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Really?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And that was another, because *The Little Mermaid* came out November. *Aladdin* came out in November. And I think *Beauty and the Beast* was either November or December.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Interesting.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And each one of those just made more money than the previous one. That was expected to be a huge thing. You know, they basically presented the big “Circle of Life” sequence from the beginning at ShoWest and, like, you know, blew the roof off the place. Like, *The Lion King* was going to be a hit. *The Flintstones* was going to be a hit. *True Lies* was going to be a hit. So, you know, we were all kind of anticipating that. The level of movie that, like, hit in 1994, though, kind of points to another narrative that emerged that year, and I kind of only realized this in hindsight as I went back and reread stuff. But we all kind of bemoan the death of the mid-budget movie. I’ve heard you several times on this podcast say, like, “Oh, I miss, you know, the \$30 million movie.”

But I think you can begin to see studios trending away from those kinds of movies because of successful years like 1994. I came across this quote from Tom Sherak, also an executive at Fox. And he basically was saying, like, you either open big or you die. And here's what he said. He said, "There's no middle ground. It's easier to do \$100 million than \$50 million. You knew *The Santa Clause* would do \$100 million the day it opened. With *Nell*," the Jodie Foster movie, "we'll have to fight to get to \$50 million, and we won't even get there." So, you know, Hollywood doesn't always learn the right lessons, but it does feel like, to me, that, you know, the kind of thinking began to shift after these big mid-90s hits. You know, movies were getting more expensive to make. The stars' salaries were just getting bigger and bigger. So, they begin to chase these \$100 million gross movies, because they know that's where the big money is. Because the average studio film at the time cost \$40 million to make and more, so it could gross \$50 million, which is a healthy sum of money, and still be considered a disappointment.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

So, when you look at the hits of, like, 1994, and then you also factor in, like, the advancements in CGI, that meant a certain kind of movie was available that wasn't previously available, and it's maybe telling that by the end of the decade, by 1999, it wasn't just the top 10 films of the year that were making \$100 million or more, it was the top 20 films. So, like, double by 1999, were making \$100 million gross or more.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's interesting. I'm looking at the top list right now. We're obviously in the – very much in the movie star heyday as well. But, you know, *Forrest Gump*, Tom Hanks. *True Lies*, Arnold Schwarzenegger. *The Santa Clause* is worth mentioning because Tim Allen, I think it was, like – was this year that he had the number-one movie, the number-one show and, like, the number-one book all at the same time or something like that?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, that's exactly right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

So, very much a star. *The Flintstones*. There's IP for you. *Dumb and Dumber* and *The Mask*, both in the top 10. Jim Carrey just coming into full bloom that year. *Clear and Present Danger*, fully on the back of Harrison Ford. I mean, you know, I don't actually like that movie very much. I know that's something that people love. I think *Patriot Games* is better. But a big hit that year. And *Speed*, you know, no movie stars in *Speed* yet.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

That's right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

You know what I mean? And then *Pulp Fiction* very much, to me, along with *Speed*, the box office story of the year in some sense, beyond, you know, the juggernaut status of *Forrest Gump* and *The Lion King*. Because for a movie like *Pulp Fiction* to make \$107 million is incredible.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. And '94 was a year where there were, like, no sure things, like, where that old adage, like, "nobody knows anything," really proved true. Because it's so surprising when you kind of go through the year and you look at, you know, the number of proven box office draws or proven marquee names or known brands, even sequels – there were a bunch of sequels that year – that either just outright flopped or seriously underperformed. And just, like, the list is, like, Kevin Costner, Julia Roberts, Eddie Murphy, Warren Beatty, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Macaulay Culkin, Nick Nolte, like, it just keeps going and keeps going. It's a really deep – like, if you were a star in 1994, chances are, you had a disappointment that year. And this is probably too grandiose of a point to make, but I'm going to make it anyway. Like, in its own weird way, 1994, I feel, is maybe, like, a tiny mirror or microcosm of what happened in the '60s and '70s when the studios just didn't have their finger on the pulse of what moviegoers wanted at a specific moment in time. You know, we talked about Jim Carrey-

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

And if they did it was an accident.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Like, Warner Bros. released *Ace Ventura* in February, the beginning of February. Everybody was blindsided by its success. Tom Pollock, who was running Universal at the time, apparently ordered his staff to go see it just to be, like, "Help me understand this." Like, "What is good about this movie?" So, you know, things like that are happening because, you know, new faces and new voices were able to emerge out of this glut of kind of high-profile disappointments. *Speed* certainly benefited from that. Keanu Reeves, Sandra Bullock, Jan de Bont all were recipients of that kind of, like, timing and circumstances. But you're right, the two biggest recipients were Jim Carrey and Quentin Tarantino, and part of their success is owed to the fact that there were these independent studios that year that really came to play in a major way, and those were New Line, Miramax and Gramercy.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

And by the way, Jim Carrey, we might as well drill down real quick. I mean, if the audience was anything like me, they're coming off of four years of absolutely loving *In Living Color*. I mean, that was appointment television for me, probably my favorite show, you know, in '90, '91, '92. I just loved it so much. And he was the star of the show in so many ways, as much as everybody on that show was brilliant. And so, he was primed to come out just, you know, go off like a cannon once he moved into movies. And, you know, these three movies that year, *Ace Ventura*, *The Mask* and *Dumb and Dumber*, indicative of that and it's, again, part of the reason I was going to the movies so much that year was to go see Jim Carrey movies.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, I knew that movie must – or that year must have been huge for you because I knew you liked *In Living Color* so much. That wasn't really a show I watched much, so I was also part of the chorus going, "Who is Jim Carrey?" He made that movie for \$350,000. That's what he got paid for *Ace Ventura*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. And then 450 For *The Mask*, right?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. \$450,000 for *The Mask*, so a slight increase.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

\$7 million for *Dumb and Dumber*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

\$7 million for *Dumb and Dumber*, so, by that point-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Those numbers are ingrained in my head for some reason.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

By that point, he knew what he was worth to these places. And, you know, New Line, let's talk about them. They, you know – he was starring in *The Mask* for them in the summer. He had signed that contract before *Ace Ventura* came out. They were an independent studio, the house that Freddy built. That's kind of the line about them. They released all the Freddy Krueger movies. They also had a hit with, you know, the Ninja Turtle movies in 1990. But Ted Turner bought them at the beginning of '94, so, they were kind of catapulted to a whole new level. *The Mask's* budget was \$23 million, because they had all the effects. It comes out at the end of July, breaks even on opening weekend. Another big hit. Ends up making close to \$120 million. The next one's *Dumb and Dumber* for him. \$7 million there. It makes even more money than *The Mask* did. So, he's huge, and New Line is, like, presenting itself now as this major player. They started making big moves. They spent \$4 million in 1994 to acquire Shane Black's script for *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, which I know people love that movie now. That movie – that did not-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Do they?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I think so. It seems to have a pretty big following on-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's sort of the infamous example of just overspending on a screenplay, though, isn't it?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. I mean, that's what it turned out to be. When that movie comes out in '96, like, it doesn't, you know – that gamble did not pay off for them. But in 1994, they're one of the big success stories.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

When did Michael De Luca come in and start running things at New Line? Because that's something I'm looking at right now, trying to peg that down.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

That's a good question.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Because what's fascinating about New Line is, yes, they would become this major player and do stuff like that, but they would also become the house of Paul Thomas Anderson, you know? They would become the house of stuff like Friday, you know, these kinds of other voices, kind of riding that line of indie-slash-major in a fascinating way, and all of it building to, of all things, *Lord of the Rings*-

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

-in 2001. So, I've always been fascinated by the New Line story. And I actually interviewed Michael. I did that that oral history on *Wag the Dog*-

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

-like a year or two ago at *Vanity Fair*. Plug. And yeah, they just – I've always been really fascinated by New Line's, just, place in the world of cinema of the '90s, you know?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. Well, I was a big Ninja Turtle head.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, yeah. Same.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

So, I was all about those first – in fact, in '93 – I saw all those movies opening day. In '93, I was, I guess, 11 when the movie came out, and I was – I had the sneaky suspicion that, like, maybe I was getting too old for the Ninja Turtles. Nevertheless, I still went to go see it on opening day in March of '93. But another company in '94 that was kind of another indie was Gramercy, and we've kind of already talked about their movie.

You know, if we back up to the beginning of the year into the spring, nothing was really hitting. You know, in 1990, there had been like, the precedent-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What was their movie, by the way? Let's just be clear. Gramercy's '94 movie.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

*Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

\$5 million, small British comedy ends up making \$52 million here, \$250 million worldwide.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

The biggest movie in the UK ever at the time, I think.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I think so. Yeah, it came out on five screens in March, gets great reviews, has great word of mouth. It just keeps expanding. And this is what – I love box office statistics like this. In its sixth week of release, that's when it reaches number one at the box office. Yeah, it just keeps expanding, over 1,000 screens at its widest. Gramercy also has *Jason's Lyric* that year, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, both of which did well for them. But it's really *Four Weddings* that's the big one, and it makes a big star out of Hugh Grant, which, you know, like Jim Carrey, he's this new face that audiences really aren't that familiar with, and they seem very tired of, like, the stars of the day and hungry for something else. And, you know, that's another one that – because when that movie came out, you know, at a time when, like, *The Hunt for Red October* had been successful in 1990, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Basic Instinct*, *Indecent Proposal*, those spring hits, there had been no spring hits in '94 except for *Ace Ventura* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's interesting. I'm not a huge fan of *Four Weddings*, either. I watched it again, and I'm just, like, I can't get there with it. Maybe that's partly because of, just – it's so seminal, right? Like, you've seen a million versions of it by now. And I saw it for the first time, actually, in film school. Yeah, I've just never been a huge fan of it. It just doesn't speak to me very much.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, I rewatched it as part of this project. It didn't do a lot for me. I liked it back then. I think that was the first year I saw all the Academy Award nominees for Best Picture before the Oscars, so I saw it on video, actually. I remember that. Liked it then, but I liked everything then. This, you know – this time it, yeah, kind of fell flat for me. I thought

a lot of the comedy was either strained or telegraphed. But John Hannah is really good in it. I think he's, you know, kind of the MVP of the movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's fresh at the time.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I mean, it's the beginning of that Richard Curtis voice, right?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Right. People at the time referred to it as, like, a facelift on kind of the romantic comedy cliches, and, you know, that proved to be, like, yeah, a common refrain you would hear. It's just, like, the new voices, the new faces, the new players. But the biggest player, obviously, the one that made its bones in 1994 and just kind of became a permanent fixture, was Miramax. They had recently been bought by Disney, as you mentioned, and they'd had crossover successes before with, like, *The Crying Game* and *The Piano*. But in 1994, they really kind of became a studio to be reckoned with, and it was really just on the strength of two movies. They had *The Crow*, which was originally set up at Paramount, and Paramount actually made it. After the, you know, tragedy of Brandon Lee's death, they decided to sell it off rather than releasing it, and Miramax bought it and then they put it on the most screens of any movie that they had ever released, and that proved to be a hit for them.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Now, how much of a footprint did Dimension have at that point? Was that part of, like, establishing that further?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

That's a good question. I'm not exactly sure.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Because Dimension – just to be clear – Dimension Films was sort of the side shingle within Miramax of their more genre movies, I guess.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, they did the horror movies and the sci-fi movies. I feel like – was *Fortress* Miramax or was that Dimension? Because that movie had come out in '93, I believe. I'm just not sure which one was actually responsible for it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Let's see. Dimension.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**



OK. So, they were around.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Although, it says Dimension, North America and Japan, and then it says “through Miramax Films.” I don’t quite know what that’s about. But, anyway, point is they put that label on it, so.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. And then, of course, *Scream* was the one that really made Dimension a big thing-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

-in ‘96. But then, obviously, the other one was *Pulp Fiction*. Again, a movie that was actually set up at Tristar. That was a Sony property. Set up at Tristar. They put it into turnaround. Miramax picked it up, got it made. You know, it wins the Palme d’Or in May that year and just, like, from that point on, just more and more hype surrounding this movie. Like, it was kind of inescapable. It doesn’t open until October. Miramax puts it out on 1,300 screens, which is not as many as *The Crow*, but still a lot, when you think – particularly when you think about, like, *Reservoir Dogs*, at its peak, was only on 61 screens. So, like, 1,300 screens for *Pulp Fiction*. It opens number one, stays there the next week, and like I said, just an inescapable pop-culture Touchstone all the way up through the Oscars. Everybody breaks through. It was made for \$8 million, grosses 107, like you said. Critics love it. Oscars come. You know, Tarantino wins his first writing Oscar.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And, obviously, it holds up to this day. It endures more than any other movie of that year.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I agree.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

To the point that we all agree that it should have won Best Picture. I mean, it’s one of those – people remember *Forrest Gump* poorly, in part, because of the movie that it beat at the Oscars, I think.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, and, you know, like, *Forrest Gump* – yeah, people kind of forget just what a phenomenon that movie was. You know, it did not make \$300 million just in a vacuum. Like, people really responded to that movie. I mean, like, yeah, I think people eventually got sick of it. And, you know, I watched it – I haven’t watched it yet for this one, but the last time I watched it, I, you know – I was kind of bummed at my response. I didn’t— because I used to love the movie – I wasn’t really responding to it, and that really

bumped me out, because it was an important movie to me then. But it was an important movie to a lot of people. You know, Siskel and Ebert both had it on their top 10 list of the year. Like, you know, they weren't – you may not always agree with their tastes, but they weren't, like, dumb-dumbs, you know? Like, it was a real phenomenon. People did like that movie. So, to, like, kind of condescend to it now is to kind of misremember what it represented then, I think.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Because, like, it, you know – it opened at number one, and then, you know, would fall out of number one, then come back to number one. Like, it had more number-one appearances than any other movie, and I think it was – it's something, like, it did it four or five times in nine weeks of release. Like, it would fall out, come back. So, people were returning to it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I was going to say, what that tells you is people are going back. I mean, you don't hit those numbers without repeat viewings.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I'm going to start just throwing some movies out there, and let's just see what it spurs. First one. I like this movie. I understand a lot of people don't, and didn't: *Natural Born Killers*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, *Natural Born Killers*. I have watched that. I know you are a big fan of Robert Richardson.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I think his work in that is – what an incredible run of movies he had in the '90s.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

That being one of them. I recently rewatched it. I don't love the movie for, honestly, the same reason Tarantino, who, you know, wrote the original version of the script, doesn't like it. Like, you know, it's – he thinks it just has kind of one thing to say. And I think – I

agree with it. I think it does have one thing to say, and it like just screams that at the top of its lungs for-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Which I think is its brilliance, by the way. I could care less what Tarantino has to say about that movie.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Sure.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Like, he's so whiny about it, to me, and I'm just, like – dude, on a craft level, I just think that movie is superlative.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, I mean, here's what I'll say about it. Whenever I watch an Oliver Stone movie, even the ones I don't like, I'm, like, "OK, I think I should watch another Oliver Stone movie soon." Like, there's something about the way his movies were shot and cut in those days that are just, I find, so compelling. And it's interesting to think about Oliver Stone, because the next year, he made *Nixon*, and to me, like, that's kind of the last, quote, unquote, "Oliver Stone movie." Like, when you think of Oliver Stone, I think you're thinking of *JFK*. You're thinking of *Nixon*. You're thinking of *Natural Born Killers*. Probably not *U Turn*. You know-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*The Doors*. *The Doors* has that aesthetic very much going for it.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. And, you know, he was kind of at the top. Like, he was talking about making *Evita* next. He was talking about making *Noriega* with Al Pacino. He was talking about producing *Planet of the Apes*. And none of those films happened with him, but, you know, like, he was one of the biggest, you know, contenders in Hollywood every year, and that kind of ended the next year. But, yeah, I feel like *Natural Born Killers* almost doesn't need me to watch it, doesn't need me to engage with it. It's, like, doing its own thing, proud to be doing its own thing, and I don't even need to be there for it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I often say I'm very much a fan of audacity, and so, that movie has that in spades.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And it is audacious, for sure.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Here's another one I'm pointing to, and I find the box office number for this movie to be surprising: *Airheads*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, *Airheads*. That was another Fox movie. That was on the Fox slate. Opened at number 10, fell out of the top 10 the very next week, like, that movie flopped hard. I think it – what did it make? \$5 million?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

\$5 million.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. So, I think you're a big fan of that movie. Is that right?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I'm a huge fan of that movie. I've seen that movie more times than most, I'll say that.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. I saw it for the first time, I don't know, three or four years ago. So, you know, it wasn't hitting me where I was at that point in my life.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It was another HBO movie for me, by the way. It was on constantly.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, and I remember that HBO First Look, as well. Yeah. Brendan Fraser, Steve Buscemi. What's interesting, Michael Lehmann directed it. He was coming off of *Hudson Hawk*, which also flopped hard.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Poor guy.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. But then he came back in '96. He had a little sleeper hit with *The Truth About Cats & Dogs*. So, you know-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Another movie I like a lot, actually.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I liked it back then. I haven't seen it since, but.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I haven't either. But that was another HBO staple. No, I would just would think, you know, the Adam Sandler of it all might have pushed things a little further than \$5 million in 1994, you know?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, you have to remember, he was relatively new. Like, he was in *Airheads* that year. He was in *Mixed Nuts* at the end of the year.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But when did his *Saturday Night Live* stint begin? I mean, he had fans.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, he had fans. He was on it then. I'm not sure that they were ready for him in, like, a supporting role, but they, you know – I think *Billy Madison* opened at number one in '95.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I mean, by then, when he's a star, he's a star. But that trio is so fascinating. Brendan Fraser, Adam Sandler and Steve Buscemi. I'm ready for the anniversary photos.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, well, Brendan Fraser had that. He had *With Honors*. He had *The Scout*, all in '94. And kind of the line on him by the end of the year was, like, they're not showing up for him. But, of course, you know, five years later, '99, he's in *The Mummy*, and that's a big hit, so.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Why is he breaking out in '94 with all these rolls. Is that all just off of *Encino Man*?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

*Encino Man* and *School Ties* were in '92.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*School Ties*, yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And so, I think it's always like one of those things where, you know, how, like, Sam Worthington was in a bunch of movies in the wake of *Avatar*, you know? I think word of mouth carries you so far and then you've got to deliver. And that was – he was in his being carried, you know, phase in '94.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. Great Carter Burwell score in that movie, by the way.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

In *Airheads*?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK. I don't really remember it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, it's playful. You should check it out again. I liked that movie. I'm just going close my eyes and point. Oh, I landed on a good one: *Blue Chips*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

*Blue Chips*. I rewatched that just recently. I had seen it when it came out on HBO in, like, '95. It didn't make much of an impression on me then. I thought it was, like, unexpectedly entertaining this time around.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I really like that movie.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

It's good. You know, it's written by Ron Shelton, and I think that, you know, the screenplay is a little obvious. You know, like, J.T. Walsh is having a lot of fun in the movie. He's, like, the villain, just short of, like, twirling his mustache.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, he's the biggest thief in all of cinema. Stole so many movies.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. But, like, yeah, that's – I was unexpectedly entertained. But, yeah, William Friedkin did *Blue Chips*. Kind of one of his more forgotten movies. That was another one that – Nick Nolte was in three movies in '94. It was a *Blue Chips*, it was *I'll Do Anything* and it was *I Love Trouble*, and all of them, you know, performed poorly or underwhelmed in some way. So, just another example of that. Basically, movies in '94 kind of fall into two categories. It's, like, high-profile disappointments with stars. No sure things on one hand. And then these, like, new faces, new voices, new players on the other hand, and *Blue Chips* falls into that. But, it's a – I think it's a good movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

J.T. Walsh, man. He shows up in *Outbreak* and just steals that movie in, like, three minutes.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, I remember him being pretty good in that. J.T. Walsh is always, like, a welcome appearance in a movie. He is in – I know you wanted to talk about this one – he's in *The Last Seduction*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

An interesting case study that year, by the way.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, he's got, like, two or three scenes and, like, you know, every time he appears, it's, like, "Alright! Yes. It's time for J.T. Walsh." Yeah, *The Last Seduction* is a weird thing, because at the end of the year, the New York film critics give Linda Fiorentino Best Actress. The LA film critics give John Dahl, like, a Next Generation award. October Films has the film in theaters. They want it nominated for Oscars, at least Linda Fiorentino nominated for Oscars. Here's the problem, though. It played on HBO in July, and there's a rule in the Oscars that says, you know, if a movie first plays on TV, it is ineligible. So, it's actually not on the reminder list that I'm going off of. Now, here's what happened. So, it played in Berlin in February of '94. October Films got it then with an eye toward releasing it. I don't know exactly why but, you know, their kind of rationale was, "Yeah, we're small. We kind of have to scrape by whatever means possible." HBO paid them \$1 million for the TV rights. So, you're, like, "Sure." But they were, like, "We always intended it for theatrical distribution." And then they pointed to – well, I'm getting ahead of myself. They, once it's ruled ineligible, decide to sue the Academy, for restraint of trade, is what they said. They said it would cause irreparable harm to Linda Fiorentino and to the movie if it doesn't get released in theaters – or if it's not eligible for Oscars, because they think, you know, she's got a pretty good shot of being nominated. And they point to this Bergman film from 1976 called *Face to Face* that Liv Ullman was nominated for. And it had been a Swedish miniseries. From what I can tell, though, *Face to Face*, was a theatrically released movie first. So, it actually played on TV second, so, as a precedent, that doesn't hold up. But they wanted to file a restraining order preventing the Academy from sending out that reminder list and the ballots until *The Last Seduction* was ruled eligible. And, of course, that didn't happen.

#### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Fascinating. Yeah, I mean, did you mention Ebert put it on his top 10 list?

#### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, Ebert had it on his top 10 list. And the thing – like, John Dahl had two movies theatrically released in '94, both of which had first played on HBO. *Red Rock West* was the other one. Siskel had that on his top 10 list, and that one's even funnier because it was, like, two weeks away from premiering on – not premiering, but coming out on video cassette in 1994, when a small distributor bought it and was, like, "No, I'm going to put it in theaters." So, they put it in theaters in, like January '94. Two weeks later, it's out on video. Most – if it came to a theater near you later in the year, like, it was, like, had already played on HBO in 1993, was already out on video, and then was just then coming. But, you know, both just kind of long and winding roads and complicated roads to getting to the screen.

#### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. Now, I watched two movies on your recommendation. One of them I had planned to anyway, because it was on Siskel's list: *Vanya on 42nd Street*. And the other: *Being Human*. As I understand it – did you say you liked *Being Human* or you just found it interesting? I can't remember what you said. This is the Robin Williams film, and it's a mess.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Bill Forsyth directed it. Yeah, I liked – I was surprised, because, you know, the critics I was following in '94, it would have been Owen Gleiberman of *Entertainment Weekly*, it would have been Siskel and Ebert and it would have been Lawrence Toppman at the *Charlotte Observer*. Toppman gives *Being Human* no stars. Gleiberman names it the worst film of the year. He gives him an F. Ebert calls it, I think, a complete vacuum. And, like, Siskel says something like it's a colossal misfire or something. I can't remember his exact wording. Anyway, it was hated by anybody I paid attention to. So, I was always kind of dreading it, and when I put it on for this project, I was, like, into it. Like, yeah, clearly, like, you know, it kind of overreaches. There's kind of – you can see what the compromises are. I found it pretty touching, actually, and I was surprised on Letterboxd to see that, like, other people kind of agreed with me. So, you know, maybe there's some growing amount of *Being Human* fans. You clearly didn't like it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I mean, no.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I was surprised that it actually worked for me.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's ambitious. It follows this kind of single soul, if you will, through the ages, as played by Robin Williams in different sort of time periods. And it's thematically potent, I guess. I just think it has a lot of scars, first and foremost. I mean, that narration does not work.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, the narration is unfortunate.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Which was something imposed on him, I believe. But, yeah, an interesting footnote in the year. And then *Vanya on 42nd Street*, this is Louis Malle, you know? It's, like, a group of – it's a bunch of filmed rehearsals, basically, of a group of actors performing *Uncle Vanya*, the Chekhov play, sort of adapted, I guess, in some sense, by David Mamet. And it's Wallace Shawn and Louis Malle back together again, along with André Gregory, of *My Dinner with Andre* fame. I think the note about this movie, personally, is – because I was, like – for the Oscars episode, I was looking at a bunch of movies to see, like, you know, is there anybody I think should have been nominated. Julianne Moore is pretty spectacular in the film and a big part of her big coming out in the early-90s.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I'm a big fan of it. That one snuck up on me. You know, I didn't know what to expect. I've never read or seen *Uncle Vanya* performed. And I had forgotten, I guess, that David Mamet was involved in, you know, whatever, his new interpretation or new adaptation, whatever you want to call it. But it's this fascinating and riveting thing. Part of that, you know, speaks to the strength of probably Chekhov's play, but it's – you know, it's not



quite a filmed play. It's not quite a movie. It's just, kind of – the lines are so blurred in it, and I found myself watching it in such – I was watching it in kind of in a new way, like, am I responding to the Chekhov character, or am I responding to Julianne Moore, or am I responding to whatever Malle is doing, you know? It's so intimate, I think, and so exciting because of that. There's, like, an immediacy that's there that wouldn't be there if it were just a straight adaptation, or if it were just, like, a filmed play. It is something – the lines are so blurred that I just found the experience riveting. I was really high on that. If I were to, like, make a top 10 list, that would definitely be on my top 10 list for 1994. It's one of those things where it's, like, that kind of sense of discovery that I talked about at the top of the show. It's, like, I had that again, and it was exciting, and it was for *Vanya on 42nd Street*, a movie which I really didn't know what to expect from.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I mean, there's something about seeing actors really intimately engaged with each other and explore material, as they're doing, and I do find that compelling. I don't know that I find anything overtly cinematic about the experience. I mean, I just got finished telling you how much I love *Natural Born Killers*. I mean, something like this is the polar opposite of a movie like that. But as an exercise, I do find it worthwhile. Folks should seek it out if they haven't seen it.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, Criterion, I think, just put it out at some point. So, I think it's on disc.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

We should talk about *The Shawshank Redemption* a little bit, maybe. I mean, I love *The Shawshank Redemption*. It seems to have a reputation that ebbs and flows. Some people don't think it's all that, and so they dump on it. Some people, as much as it's sort of IMDb top 250, in the number-one or -two space, kind of territory, you know, like – by which I mean, you know, the Muggles love it, if you will. But I love it. I think it's an amazing movie and wholly deserving of, you know, the accolades it got that year.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, Castle Rock really knew what they had. They had tested it. It tested better than, like, just about any other movie Castle Rock had done. Better than *A Few Good Men*. Better than – I don't even know what else. But, like, Castle Rock was high on the movie, and then it kind of comes out and just doesn't do business at all. Not many people saw that in the theater. My brother can brag about that. He saw that in a theater. I saw it in a theater, but after the Oscar nominations, so I saw it in '95 on the re-release. But, you know, I haven't watched it for this project yet, but I have seen it in the past, you know, few years. I was struck the last time I watched it that it's kind of – like, I like the movie. I think it works. It is old-fashioned in a way that, like, there are scenes that would not be out of place in a film from the '40s where Henry Fonda is playing Andy Dufresne. There are scenes that would not be out of place where, like, Burt Lancaster is playing Red. And in a lot of scenes, just, like, intact, this kind of old-fashioned, almost cornball sentimentality, but it works. Like, it really works. You know, it's made in the '90s, so, obviously, it's, you know, a much more permissive, like, decade, in terms of content and

language or whatever. Yeah, it's a good movie, and, you know, people love that. It made some top 10 lists. You know, I think that's one that people who thought '94 wasn't great might look back on now and be, like, "Oh, yeah. *Shawshank*." Because, yeah, I honestly don't know anybody that doesn't like *Shawshank*, although I guess Anne Thompson said on last week's episode-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, that surprised me too, because she tends to be the traditionalist when we're talking. No, I think I have heard things like, "Oh, it's the cargo shorts of movies," you know, shit like that.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I think people just have weird, snobbish shade for it sometimes. Not as much as *Forrest Gump*, for instance, but also notable, and I believe this is true – wasn't it a debut?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. Well-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I think he had done a TV movie, maybe?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. He had done something beforehand and he just kind of was, like-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Frank Darabont.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

"I'm not budging on this script until you let me direct this movie." So, it was, just, like, his stick-to-it-iveness that did it. Also, kind of an interesting footnote, given last week's episode, first time that Deakins was nominated for cinematography. First time that Thomas Newman was nominated for score. And those, you know, until recently for Deakins were just perennial nominees. Never won. Newman still hasn't won an Oscar. But that was a big year for him in terms of, you know, he had that and he had *Little Women* later in the year nominated for best score. Two nominees out of five in one year.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

They came together again, along with sound mixer Greg P. Russell, who is the most nominated person to never win, period, on *Skyfall*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK. Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

None of none of them won for that either. I remember that being an interesting story that year, but yeah. I'm just wanting to make sure we don't miss anything that we ought to hit. I'm scrolling a couple of things here. You know, *Interview with the Vampire*, another HBO staple for me. *Reality Bites*, the first oral history I ever wrote, by the way.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Oh, wow. I didn't know that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, I like it quite a bit. You know, it is what it is, but I like it a lot. We haven't talked about *Clerks*. I mean, to the extent that we must, Kevin Smith, to your point of new voices, obviously.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, new voices. That premiered at Sundance that year, won an award. Made for \$27,000. Miramax buys it. It's a small release, like, it doesn't have quite the penetration that, like, *Pulp Fiction* does. It still makes \$3 million, which is a, obviously, huge profit margin. And it's interesting, you know, you kind of have to remind yourself sometimes. It's easy to dunk on Kevin Smith now, but in 1994, he was, like, a fresh, new, exciting voice, to the extent that in, like, I think it was 2000, *Esquire* did a piece about who the next Scorsese he was. And who was it that chose him? It was Andrew Sarris chose Kevin Smith as his choice for who the next Scorsese would be. So, that's, you know, in March of 2000.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Andrew Sarris said that?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Andrew Sarris said that. Elvis Mitchell chose the Wachowskis. Martin Scorsese was asked this question. He chose Wes Anderson. Somebody chose Alexander Payne. Todd McCarthy, old *Variety* guy, chose Paul Thomas Anderson. And Kenneth Turan chose David O. Russell.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What was the answer, you think?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, of those guys.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I guess Paul Thomas Anderson is the closest maybe?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, and I totally get that. I think, you know, Martin Scorsese, his affection for his characters is why he went with Wes Anderson. He sees a similar sense of, you know, affection that he has for the characters in *Goodfellas* as Wes Anderson had in, like, *Bottle Rocket* or something like that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

That's the movie he kind of talked about there. That was on his best of the '90s list when he did-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I remember that, when he did it on Ebert. Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. And so, I would, you know – since he's Martin Scorsese, and he's choosing who the next – I'll probably go to him. But I certainly would understand Paul Thomas Anderson.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

My eyes went over here to *Disclosure*. I think that's interesting, because people are still riding the Michael Crichton wave. That's Barry Levinson getting into the fun.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Although, here's – I didn't know this. Milos Forman was originally going to direct that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, wow.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Which is very strange. Very strange material for him. He was going to direct it. Apparently, him and Michael Crichton didn't get along. But, you know, also written by Paul Attanasio, who did *Quiz Show*, who did a last-minute rewrite on *Speed*. So, that's his connection there.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Interesting.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

But, yeah, that movie came out, it was kind of Barry Levinson's return to good graces in the industry. He had made *Toys* in '92 and then he followed that up with *Jimmy Hollywood* earlier in '94, which was also a big flop. But, yeah, it made money. But, yeah, Crichton, he had had *Jurassic Park* and *Rising Sun* the previous year in '93. He would have *Congo* the next year in '95. But, yeah, kind of the height of-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Then Barry would do *Sphere*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, Barry would do *Sphere* in what was supposed to be '97, eventually came out in '98.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. Lots of talk of that in my *Wag the Dog* oral history, by the way.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Because they were dealing with all of that.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. Interesting.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

You also had Grisham. You know, that was the height of Grisham on screen with *The Client*. He had had *The Firm* and *The Pelican Brief* the year before. *The Chamber* had just come out, and that was actually, in '94, earmarked for Ron Howard to direct, and then he actually sold *A Time to Kill*. He had held on to those rights for so long, but he actually sold that to Hollywood in '94, after *The Client* came out. And then you have Anne Rice with *Interview with the Vampire*, obviously. Yeah, just kind of a big time for, you know, brand authors in '94.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I just saw *The Client* again the other day. I think it sort of fizzles out eventually, but I really like it, and I think it's a cool nomination to have Susan Sarandon in the mix that year for the Oscars. She's pretty great.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, she's good. She also was in *Safe Passage*, which is not a good movie, but she's so emotionally, like, invested in the role that she's so compelling. That was not a great year – you know, the conventional wisdom was – not a great year for, you know, female roles, which is why the Linda Fiorentino thing was such a big deal, because, like, she probably could have gotten nominated. But, you know, it was – you know, at the end of the year, they were, like, "Who are we even going to nominate? There haven't even been enough good roles." You know, there was, like, almost nominees, you can imagine, where Jennifer Jason Leigh for *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*. You mentioned Meryl Streep, *The River Wild*, and Meg Ryan.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Meg Ryan, yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, *When a Man Loves a Woman*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Could have nominated one of the *Heavenly Creatures* duo.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. Big year for them.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

You could have nominated the actress from *Red* or Juliette Binoche in *Blue*. We haven't talked about the trilogy, which, I guess *White* was '93, right?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, no, actually *Blue* was '93.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*Blue* was '93.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And then *White* and *Red* were '94.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Got it. Yeah. So, *White* would have been Julie Delpy.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What do you think of those movies?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I like them. I actually kind of like them – and I think this is maybe controversial – I like them in order. So, I like *Blue* the least, then *White* and then *Red*. Like, I think *Red* is – and *Red* is funny, because, like-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, wait, wait, wait. You mean in order – OK, yeah. I'm thinking of it in order of how they look on the flag.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

The French flag. I actually like *Blue* the best.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK. I think it's certainly the most formally daring.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Blue and *White*. And then I like *Red*. Very much, the craft of it is great. I just, you know – the story of *Red* doesn't work for me as much as the others do.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I respond, so much, to the, for lack of a better word, like, alienness of *Red*. Like, that is not how people interact with each other. That's not how people talk with one another. I hang on their every word, though. Like, I think the scenes with Irène Jacob and the guy are just so riveting. And I just find it so moving. But, like, if someone were to say, like, "Yeah, that's, you know, it doesn't quite work." Like, I would get that. But for me, like, I can't look away. And, yeah, *Red* is the one of that for me. I think *White* is a lot of fun, and Juliette Binoche is great in *Blue* and it's the most formally daring, but kind of the weakest for me.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And as I said last week, the cinematography in *Red* is so stunning. I would have given it the Oscar.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

The framing and the lighting is really fantastic. We could talk about *Bullets over Broadway*. I mean, there's not much else to say about it. As I said last week, I've always considered it one of his best movies, but it's, like, every time I go to recently again, it's just so frothy that I don't put it up there as, like, a "let's nominate him for director" kind of a movie. Great craft. Great, you know, production value. My favorite part of the movie is always going to be Chazz Palminteri. I just think he's so good. And it's a great script. But, you know.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, it's really Chazz Palminteri's movie. It takes him a while to, like, really kind of click into what's going on, but once he does, he just really takes the movie over. You know, it's funny, Douglas McGrath is actually co-credited as writing the screenplay, and, you know, you kind of watch now and you're, like, "Well, I wonder what was Woody Allen's. I wonder what was Douglas McGrath's." But I'm really taken with a scene. It's a scene between John Cusack and Chazz Palminteri. They're sitting side-by-side at a bar, and they're both just kind of talking about their past. Chazz Palminteri is this hitman. John Cusack is this, you know – he's this writer. And, you know, how they relate, how they

don't relate. It's a really – I don't know that there's another scene in a Woody Allen movie like that, and this time I was watching, I was just, like, I wonder if that was, like, you know, partly because of Douglas McGrath. I have no way of knowing that. But it's a scene that you know, you don't find a lot in Woody Allen's movies. I saw another critic, Mike D'Angelo, was talking about that scene. He's, like, it's maybe the only scene in a Woody Allen movie where it actually just feels like two guys talking and not actors reciting dialogue. And it does have this intimate quality. It's a great scene.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. To your point about new voices against, *Spanking the Monkey*, David O. Russell. I just looked at *Blankman* here. *Blankman* was a big HBO movie for me. That was Damon Wayans coming out of the *In Living Color* world. *Little Giants*, another HBO staple for me. You're going to find that – I mean, if people don't know by now, it's, like, my coming of age was HBO. Like, I don't know why this is. I just constantly watched movies on HBO.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Do you know who shot *Little Giants*?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh my God. I do and now I forgotten. It is somebody of note.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

It is somebody huge. A recent Oscar winner in 1994

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's not Lubezki.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

It's not Lubezki.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He did *Reality Bites*, though.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I don't remember. I know it's somebody big.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Janusz Kaminski.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yes! It's Kaminski.



**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh my God.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

That was his follow up to *Schindler's List*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Trivia.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Have you got to *Tom & Viv*. I do not want to spend time talking about this, but have you got to it yet?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I saw it for the project.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, God.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, you said it best. It's a real slog. I don't really have much more to say she. She got in. You know-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

So did Rosemary Harris.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

-Miranda Richardson. Yeah, and so did Rosemary Harris.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Weird.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It just doesn't rise to that level at all to me. It was weird to see that. The kind of infamous Altman flop of the year is worth mentioning: *Ready to Wear*. I've only seen it once, and long ago, and it's definitely just an utter mess. But notable.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, I saw it for the first time this year for the viewing project. At the beginning, I was, like, really enjoying, you know, the form of it all. Like, he's a really underrated camera director, I think. It's really fluid. It's really interesting. But eventually, like, you know, you just kind of-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It completely exhausts you after a while.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

-surrender to the rhythms of the movie and, like, there's nothing, like – there's so much potential in that movie just based on the various story threads, and it can't capitalize on any of them.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Wolf, which opened the week after *Speed*.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, Wolf was kind of one of those where it was, like, Sony released *Bram Stoker's Dracula* in '92. They had *Wolf* and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* in '94. And I think that was kind of their, like – the thing that they wanted to do was these kind of, like, modern updates of classic, horror characters, you know, with Coppola directing one, with Branagh directing one, with Mike Nichols doing one. And none of them ever, you know, went anywhere beyond *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. That was a hit. But, you know, there was still kind of this elegant horror thing in *Interview with the Vampire* in '94, which was Warners, but, you know, that's kind of a thing about '94. Like, for every wannabe hit – like, in November, 20th Century Fox released the remake of *Miracle on 34th Street*, and it just tanked. But because you had this kind of fresher, you know, hipper alternative in, of all things, *The Santa Clause*, coming out at the same time, it gobbled up-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

-you know, all the attendees that would have, you know, maybe been there for *Miracle on 34th Street*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What else is there to – well, I mean, have we missed anything that you wanted to talk about? Obviously, the scholar here of '94 movies. I don't know. I feel like I've hit it all. We talked about *Ed Wood* a lot last week. *The Professional* is, you know, a big note. I love that film.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Let me say something about *The Professional* real quick, because, whatever you think of the film, do you think this pull-quote that was on a lot of movie posters, and even the

DVD, I believe, is anywhere close to being accurate? It says, “Makes *Speed* look like a slow ride to grandma’s house.”

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Holy shit who said that? And *Speed*’s, like, “Why am I in this?”

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Right. Yeah. So, apparently that was said by a critic named Don Stotter, who worked for, like, some *Entertainment Time-Out* syndicate or syndication or something like that. I have, my whole life, until just recently, mis-attributed that quote to Peter Travers. And I would just like to apologize to Peter Travers-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He wouldn’t dare.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

-because he didn’t say that. But, you know, it does kind of have the ring of Travers.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

He didn’t say that. Don Stotter did. But, like – it’s, like, you know – it’s OK. Like, love *The Professional* all you want. Think whatever you want to about *The Professional*. That is not an accurate description of the movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No, it’s not.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

It does not in any way makes *Speed* look like a slow ride to – like, there are scenes where, like, she’s performing, like, Madonna songs. Like, quiet scenes that, like, you know, pace-wise, are not anywhere close to what *Speed* is doing. So, it’s just one of those things where just, like, that quote has always been in my head since ‘94, just going, like, “What? I don’t even understand where this person is coming from.”

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No. No. Bizarre. Anything to say about *Stargate*?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

*Stargate* was a surprise hit. It was the biggest opening of October at that point.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

And, you know, people were speculating, like, how did this movie succeed as well as it did? Like, there weren't that many sci-fi movies in '94. Like, *Timecop* kind of benefited from that. *Stargate* benefited from that. And *Star Trek Generations* benefited. Not a ton of sci-fi movies. And, like, you know, there was a lot of similarity elsewhere. I mentioned, you know, five baseball movies. Like, a bunch of westerns. Like, just, not that many sci-fi movies, and *Stargate* came along and just, you know, became a sleeper hit.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It's a movie that starts out so strong and then just utterly falls apart.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I agree. Curiously, that is actually another one that was, like, a formative experience for me, based solely on the score. Because David Arnold scored that movie. He was a complete unknown quantity to me then, and he had only scored one other movie, *The Young Americans*. And so, this was a composer I had never heard of, and then to walk into the theater and, like, hear this main title music, which, you know, my thing then was, like, these big, brassy, cinematic overtures, and that's what it delivers. I still think that *Speed* – oh, sorry, that *Stargate* is the last of the essential sci-fi scores kind of in the *Star Wars* mode.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. *Chasers* is a movie I saw a few times on HBO as well. I think it's fun that Hopper had a movie in theaters that he directed as *Speed* was coming out.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

The man never stopped working.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah, not a particularly well-liked movie, but it was, like, so clearly, like, one where he's just, like, calling in favors from his friends. Because, you know, there's all these colorful, like, actors that just have, like, one scene and then they disappear. But those are the only times the film really comes alive.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And I know we're going long here. I don't really give a shit. I mean, we're talking about an entire year of cinema, so-

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

There's nothing more fun than talking about movies from 1994.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Just stick with us. Although we are running out of things to talk about here, and I'm just looking at my list here. I'm looking at shit like *Cabin Boy* now, which tells us that we're coming to the end of our rope. *The Getaway*. *The Getaway* remake with Alec Baldwin and Kim Basinger. Another HBO staple for me. To this day I've still never seen *The Specialist*, by the way.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

OK. Well, yeah, it's, you know, Sylvester Stallone, Sharon Stone, James Woods. That is something that always sticks out about that movie, because, you know, I was reading film criticism then. My local critic Lawrence Toppman of the *Charlotte Observer*, pointed out – and, like, this is a screenwriting thing that has always stuck with me – he was, like, the characters' names are, like, Ray Quick. Fay something. Like, Joe – it's, like, a pattern of, like, three-letter first names and, like, five- or six-letter second – and he pointed to that as, like, "This is stupid." Like, that has always stuck in my mind. It's, like, don't have your characters' names be that simple.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Is Lawrence Toppman still with us?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

He is still with us. In fact, I saw him at a movie the other day.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Holy shit.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Which was, like, you know, a small-scale celebrity sighting for me. But, yeah, I saw that movie *Memory* with Peter Sarsgaard, and Jessica Chastain, and he was he was in attendance.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, I hope he appreciates that his name has been uttered on an episode of this podcast perhaps more than anyone save for Sandra Bullock or Keanu Reeves.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Lawrence Toppman.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Lawrence Toppman. That's something I should mention, too. You know, Jonathan grew up in Charlotte. I grew up, like, a half-hour, 45 minutes north in Salisbury. So, we are very much from the same neck of the woods.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. And then we ended up at the North Carolina School of the Arts.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

In Winston-Salem. Well, let's put a bow on this. What's final line on '94? And of course, also, anything that we haven't touched that you were eager to.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Just, you know, that sense of discovery is still there for me. I watched *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould* recently. I watched *What Happened Was*. I watched *Vanya on 42nd Street*, which we already talked about. I watched *Dangerous Game*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, I did – that's another one you recommended me watch, and I did watch it.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

What did you think?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

She's amazing in it.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Madonna is great in that movie. Like, it's a revelatory performance. That movie came out in '93 in New York, still eligible for Oscars in '94, for some reason.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, how's that?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I don't know. I found it captivating. Like, it's, like, kind of darkly hypnotic. I'm warning you it is a rough watch.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

As you might expect from Abel Ferrara. But, like, that sense of discovery is still there. Like, it was alive and well when I watched these movies I just mentioned.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And an interesting pairing with *Vanya on 42nd Street*, by the way, for what they are. Because you're watching – like, in *Vanya*, you're watching this sort of filmed-rehearsals movie, and in *Dangerous Game*, there's sort of a film-within-a-film thing with a guy making a movie. It's just – I don't know, it's just playing with form in a fun way.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Yeah. And all those movies I just mentioned, like, you know – it's, like, again, like, what is this thing, and where will it lead me next? And that's exciting to me.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

So, '94 still has that power over me.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What's your favorite movie from '94?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I mean, I haven't rewatched it yet for the purposes of my viewing project-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Quiz Show?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Well, *Quiz Show* would be two. It's got to be *Pulp Fiction*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

OK.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

I mean, I rewatched it last – you know, you mentioned I did the 70 run of *The Hateful Eight*. After that was over, I ended up just rewatching all of Tarantino's movies, just to do it as a fun little thing. It was still as electrifying, it was still as dynamic to me in, what was that, 2015, beginning of 2016? It was still all those things to me that it was when I was in eighth grade seeing it for the first time in 1994. So, you know, got to go with that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What did you think of *Speed*? I know you liked it, but would that be on your top 10 list?

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Oh, absolutely. Like, every time I watch *Speed*, you know, it's just so undeniably well made. Like, I probably would have nominated Jan de Bont for Best Director. Like, I think he deserves it. And, you know, it's just such a well-made movie. It's so exciting and it was one of those that I saw in '94. For the first time, it was, like, the movie I was interested in was also critically acclaimed. Gleiberman gave it an A and I remember he reviewed it on the same day he reviewed *Little Buddha*, which he gave a C+ to, and I was, like, "Huh, that's interesting." You know, I'm sure I was aware that *The Last Emperor* had won Best Picture and that Bertolucci directed that. And I was, like, "That's the movie that's supposed to get the A."

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**JONATHAN FOSTER**

Like, *Speed* is supposed to get the C+. But they were reversed. Siskel and Ebert gave it the coveted “two very enthusiastic thumbs up.” So, they loved it. And then, Lawrence Toppman gave it three and a half stars out of four, and that was really the first time that the critics I was into were, like, as excited about the movie I was excited about, and that was so affirming as, like, you know, a 12-year-old going to the movies being, like, “Yeah, this action movie is as good as I think it is.”

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

And can I just say, there’s this website, criticstop10.com, and you can go dig into, just – they’ve done analyses of just all the lists available to them from various years. And when you look at the ‘94 lists, again, based on the collective of lists they have, *Speed* is number seven on the overall top 10 of that year. Better than *The Lion King*. Better than *Shawshank* better than *Bullets over Broadway*. *Speed* was on 84 lists, but zero top spots. But 84 lists. And, you know, right after that is *Hoop Dreams* on 97 lists with 13 top spots, then *Ed Wood* on 99 lists and six top spots. Like, whatever their sort of rubric is for determining this list. I just think that’s fascinating. But then, you know, *Forrest Gump* is number four, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* is number three, *Quiz Show* is number two and, of course, *Pulp Fiction* is number one. So, I love that, too. I love the fact that – and I have done my episode, by now, on the kind of critical acclaim of the film – I love that it was a film that critics were, like, “Yes, this movie kicks ass.”

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

And another reason it was so formative, because, like, you know, I was interested in action movies. I saw every action movie. I was very excited about *True Lies*, which we haven’t really talked about. And I remember watching *True Lies* and being, like, “Yeah, I like this. It’s not as exciting as *Speed*,” you know? And I saw *Terminal Velocity* in the fall, and it’s, like, “Yeah, OK. Not as good as *Speed*.” So, it became this kind of standard by which all other action movies were judged for me, which is, you know, substantial.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

To say the least. And anybody listening to this knows that I feel that way. So, I hope you all stuck with us for this entire opus. You are not going to find a more thorough distillation of the films of 1994 anywhere else, I don’t think, so, if you did stick with us, and you’re here listening to us right now, thank you for sticking with us. And thank you, Jonathan, for doing this, man. I really appreciate it. I knew you’d be the guy to do it. And I just, you know – it’s awesome to reminisce with you. So, thank you so much.

### **JONATHAN FOSTER**

Absolutely. And can I – I just want to say one more thing I, and please leave this in. I don’t want to embarrass you. But, like I – what you’ve done with this podcast, I think, is just incredible and remarkable, and it’s been such a singular thing to see your devotion to it, and I think hearing the voices of these people has, like, so humanized it in a way that I find very moving. I don’t – this will not be replicated, ever, I don’t think. So, congratulations. You’re so close to the end, and I’m just really proud of you. Great job.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**



Thank you, brother. I appreciate that so much. That's Jonathan Foster, everybody.

## [OUTRO MUSIC]

### KRIS TAPLEY

Next week on *50 MPH*...

### KRIS TAPLEY

It's high time we had a discussion about the fandom surrounding *Speed*. We talk to the collectors.

### IAN FAILES

It's probably 1,000 pieces. It's a bit over the top. It takes up a lot of my house here and now garage, and my girlfriend is pretty much just getting used to it.

### RYAN BEITZ

I went to another pawn shop that was liquidating VHS, and I just picked up all the *Speed*. It was, like, maybe eight, or something, on the shelf. And the guy goes, "Are you trying to buy, like, just, like, all the *Speed*?" And I was, like, "Yes, absolutely."

### KRIS TAPLEY

As well as those exercising their passion for the film in creative ways.

### NATALIE BOCHENSKI

I came up with Act React because acting for scripted and reacting for improvisation, so, I figured that kind of covered both worlds. But that name took on a bit of an extra life, then, when we came up with *Speed: The Movie, The Play*.

### MATTHEW WALDEN

For me, it was a little bit of sugar to help the medicine go down, for our listeners, but I wanted people to, like, have a reason to listen each week, and what better reason than *Speed*?

### KRIS TAPLEY

All of that and more next week right here on *50 MPH*!

### KRIS TAPLEY

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website 50MPHPodcast.com. If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.