Some interesting films on US television, September 18-24

Marty Jonas (MJ), David Walsh (DW)
18 September 1999

Video pick of the week—find it in your video store

A Shock to the System (1990)—A middle-aged advertising executive being kicked off the corporate ladder by younger men discovers how easy it is in our society to literally get away with murder. He then begins—with some glee—to dispose of those who stand in his way. This very dark comedy—reminiscent of Chaplin's classic *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947)—has a marvelously deadpan performance by Michael Caine as the murderous executive. With Elizabeth McGovern, Peter Riegert and Swoosie Kurtz. Directed by Jan Egleson. (MJ)

Asterisk indicates a film of exceptional interest. All times are EDT.

A&E=Arts & Entertainment, AMC=American Movie Classics, FXM=Fox Movie Channel, HBOF=HBO Family, HBOP=HBO Plus, HBOS=HBO Signature, IFC=Independent Film Channel, TCM=Turner Classic Movies, TMC=The Movie Channel, TNT=Turner Network Television

Saturday, September 18

*7:30 a.m. (HBOS)— *Strangers on a Train* (1951)—Hitchcock classic, with Farley Granger as a callow tennis player and Robert Walker as a psychopath, based on the Patricia Highsmith novel, co-scripted by Raymond Chandler. (DW)

*8:45 a.m. (Showtime)— *Reds* (1981)—Warren Beatty's account of the life and times of John Reed, American socialist and author of *Ten Days that Shook the World*, the authoritative chronicle of the October Revolution of 1917. With Diane Keaton and others. (DW)

9:15 a.m. (HBOS)— *Ulee's Gold* (1997)—Peter Fonda gives a strong, sensitive performance as a Florida beekeeper who struggles to keep his troubled family from spinning apart. The film is weakened by a neat, uplifting ending. Directed by Victor Nunez. (MJ)

10:00 a.m. (FXM)— *The Hustler* (1961)—Basically a boxing film, but set among serious pool sharks. Robert Rossen's movie is beautifully shot and capably acted, but the dialogue is full of stagey, pseudo-profound, high-proletarian language. With Paul Newman, Piper Laurie, George C. Scott and Jackie Gleason. MJ)

10:00 a.m. (TBS)— *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)—In the first of Sergio Leone's Italian Westerns Clint Eastwood, in the role that made him a star, plays the Man With No Name. The story, a remake of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, involves warring families in a border town. Ennio Morricone's score is striking. With Gian Maria Volonte and Marianne Koch. (DW)

10:00 a.m. (Sundance)— *Vanya on 42nd Streeet* (1994)—Louis Malle directed this film, his last, about a group of actors rehearsing an adaptation of Chekhov's Uncle Vanya. Andre Gregory is the director; writer Wallace Shawn plays the lead character. (DW)

12:05 p.m. (TBS)— *For a Few Dollars More* (1966)—The sequel to *A Fistful of Dollars*. One of the more memorable "spaghetti Westerns"; with Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef and Gian Maria Volonte, directed by Sergio Leone. (DW)

12:15 p.m. (TCM)— *The Dirty Dozen* (1967)—Twelve convicts, serving life sentences, are recruited for a suicidal commando raid in Robert Aldrich's film. (DW)

1:00 p.m. (HBO)— *Super Mario Brothers* (1993)—Underrated, highly imaginative film version of the popular video game, to which it bears only a slight resemblance. The two plumber brothers (Bob Hoskins and John Leguizamo) visit an alternate universe in which evolution took a different course, leaving dinosaurs as the dominant species. Dennis Hopper overacts wonderfully as the dinosaur dictator of this world. (MJ)

2:00 p.m. (Cinemax)— *American Gigolo* (1980)—Paul Schrader wrote and directed this flawed but fascinating study of an upscale male prostitute. Starring Richard Gere. (MJ)

4:00 p.m. (FXM)— *At Long Last Love* (1975)—Burt Reynolds and Cybill Shepherd can neither sing nor dance—they are definitely not Astaire and Rogers. Still, it's fun to watch them mangle Cole Porter's beautiful music and lyrics. Peter Bogdanovich's glitzy, expensive film proves that a warm affection for 1930's film musicals is not enough. One of the great bombs. With Madeline Kahn (often funny, despite her material) and John Hillerman. (MJ)

5:00 p.m. (Sci-Fi)— *The Fly* (1986)—David Cronenberg's film about a scientist (Jef Goldblum) who experiments on himself and evolves into a human fly. Cronenberg apparently saw his character's condition as a metaphor for AIDS. Geena Davis is the woman who stands by him. As usual, Cronenberg gets caught up in the machinery of his conceits and loses track of his theme. (DW)

*5:00 p.m. (HBOS)— *North by Northwest* (1959)—One of Alfred Hitchcock's wondrous late 1950s color pieces, with Cary Grant as an ad executive turned into a wanted and hunted man. (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)— *The Apartment* (1960)—Billy Wilder's cynical-sentimental comedy-drama about a corporate lackey (Jack Lemmon) who tries to climb the company ladder by loaning his apartment to his bosses for their trysts. He falls for Shirley MacLaine. Fred MacMurray is memorable as a particularly unpleasant company executive. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (Encore)— *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997)—Mike Myers plays a double role in this consistently amusing send-up of James Bond movies and the manners and styles of the 1970s. (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (Sundance)— *Vanya on 42nd Streeet* (1994)—See 10:00 a.m.

*10:25 p.m. (TNT)— *Fargo* (1996)—A kidnaping goes terribly wrong in Minnesota, and a pregnant, low-key, small-town sheriff (Frances McDormand) tries to solve it. Grotesque, satirical, sometimes cartoonish, often funny, this is one of the Coen Brothers' best films. With Steve Buscemi, William H. Macy, Peter Stormare and Harve Presnell. (MJ)

12:00 a.m. (FXM)— *The Hustler* (1961)—See 10:00 a.m.

12:40 a.m. (HBOS)— *Ulee's Gold* (1997)—See 9:15 a.m.

3:45 a.m. (Starz)— *The Name of the Rose* (1986)—A murder mystery set in a medieval monastery (the MacGuffin is a lost book by Aristotle). Though lacking much of the rich detail of Umberto Eco's fine novel, the film stands well on its own. Sean Connery is perfect as the monk-detective, John of Baskerville. With Christian Slater, F. Murray Abraham and William Hickey. Directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud. (MJ)

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4:15 a.m. (TCM)— *D.O.A.* (1950)—Rudolph Mate directed this film about a man (Edmond O'Brien) who discovers he has been poisoned and attempts to find out why and who has done it in the time he has left. With Pamela Britton, Luther Adler. (DW)

Sunday, September 19

6:00 a.m. (FXM)— *At Long Last Love* (1975)—See Saturday at 4:00 p.m.

8:00 a.m. (AMC)— *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1957)—James Stewart, a little long in the tooth, plays Charles Lindbergh in this mediocre Billy Wilder film about the first transatlantic flight in 1927. (DW)

*8:45 a.m. (TCM)— *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951)—John Huston's intelligent adaptation of Stephen Crane's Civil War novel, about a young soldier in the Union army who runs from his first encounter with the enemy, but comes to terms with his fear. (DW)

3:00 p.m. (Sci-Fi)— *The Fly* (1986)—See Saturday at 5:00 p.m.

*3:30 p.m. (HBOP)— *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985)—Woody Allen combines Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* and Fellini's *The White Sheik* to come up with a satisfying tale about a drab housewife (Mia Farrow) romanced by a character (Jeff Daniels) who literally steps out of the movie screen. (MJ)

4:00 p.m. (FXM)— *Heaven Can Wait* (1943)—Don Ameche stars as a dead man seeking entry to hell, who recounts in flash back what he thinks has been a life full of sin. With Gene Tierney and Charles Coburn. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. (DW)

*6:00 p.m. (TNT)— *Fargo* (1996)—See Saturday at 10:25 p.m.

9:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989)—The tall tales of the German baron are retold by Terry Gilliam in his typical brilliant but sprawling style. With John Neville and too much Robin Williams. (MJ)

10:00 p.m. (TCM)— *The Citadel* (1938)—King Vidor's moving and insightful adaptation of the A. J. Cronin novel about an idealistic doctor who experiences a few disappointments in a mining village and opts to treat the wealthy and hypochondriacal instead. With Robert Donat and Rosalind Russell. (DW)

3:30 a.m. (Bravo)— *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989)—See 9:30 p.m.

Monday, September 20

6:00 a.m. (FXM)— *Heaven Can Wait* (1943)—See Sunday at 4:00 p.m.

8:30 a.m. (AMC)— *Finian's Rainbow* (1968)—Petula Clark sings beautifully, Fred Astaire is miscast as her dreamy dad, and Tommy Steele quickly wears out his welcome as the broad-smiling, hyperactive leprechaun in Francis Copplola's flat version of the hit populist Broadway musical. In the course of this unrelentingly upbeat film, a tobacco-growing commune struggles for survival and a bigoted Southern senator is turned into an African-American. However, the songs by E.Y. Harburg retain their charm. (MJ)

8:30 a.m. (Showtime)— *Young Frankenstein* (1974)—One of Mel Brooks' funnier and more successful parodies, this time of the classic horror film by James Whale. Particularly effective because it uses many of the original sets. With Peter Boyle (as the monster) and Gene Wilder (as Dr. Frankenstein). (MJ)

*11:00 a.m. (AMC)— *Pete Kelly's Blues* (1955)—Underrated film about a jazz band in the 1920s and its fight against being taken over by the mob, as told by the trumpet player (Jack Webb, who also directed). Excellent jazz score. Director Webb made good use of the wide screen, so the film is best seen in letterbox format. With Peggy Lee (who won an Academy Award). (MJ)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989)—See Sunday at 9:30 p.m.

*12:45 p.m. (AMC)— *My Darling Clementine* (1946)—John Ford directed this Western about the lead-up to the gunfight at the O.K. Corral. Henry Fonda is Wyatt Earp and Victor Mature Doc Holliday. With Ward Bond, Tim Holt, Walter Brennan. (DW)

1:00 p.m. (IFC)— *Gray's Anatomy* (1996)—One of actor Spalding Gray's film monologues. This time he describes his efforts to find alternative treatments for an eye ailment. Directed by Steven Soderbergh. (DW)

2:30 p.m. (AMC)— *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955)—Howard Hawks' historical epic is full of the typical Hollywood hokum, but the scenes of the building of the pyramids are truly impressive. William Faulkner helped write the screenplay. With Jack Hawkins and Joan Collins. (MJ)

3:00 p.m. (HBOP)— *Ulee's Gold* (1997)—See Saturday at 9:15 a.m.

3:30 p.m. (Sundance)— *The Wanderers* (1979)—Philip Kaufman's film is an excellent adaptation of Richard Price's fine novel about youth gangs in the Bronx in 1963. With Ken Wahl. (MJ)

6:00 p.m. (TCM)— *David Copperfield* (1935)—W.C. Fields as Mr. Micawber and Basil Rathbone as Murdstone are highlights of this lavish film version of the Dickens novel. Freddie Bartholemew is the young David Copperfield. Directed by George Cukor. (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (Starz)— *Wag the Dog* (1997)—A US president hires a PR team to distract attention from a sex scandal by fabricating a war with Albania. Barry Levinson's film has bite, and the screenplay by David Mamet is sinister and funny. Great ensemble acting by Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Denis Leary and Anne Heche. (MJ)

8:15 p.m. (TCM)— *Marie Antoinette* (1938)—Lavish MGM spectacle about the life of the doomed queen of France. Criticized in its time, it stands up to a certain extent. Robert Morley is memorable as Louis XVI; Norma Shearer is Marie. Directed by W. S. Van Dyke. (DW)

*10:45 p.m. (HBOS)— *Mean Streets* (1973)—Excellent, highly influential film by Martin Scorsese about growing up in New York's Little Italy. With Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel, both very young, (MJ)

11:00 p.m. (TCM)— *Romeo and Juliet* (1936)—Norma Shearer and Leslie Howard were a good deal too old for their starring roles, but they perform admirably, in George Cukor's version of the tragedy. (DW)

1:35 a.m. (Sundance)— *The Wanderers* (1979)—See 3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, September 21

7:45 a.m. (IFC)— *Gray's Anatomy* (1996)—See Monday at 1:00 p.m.

8:00 a.m. (Showtime)— *At Long Last Love* (1975)—See Saturday at 4:00 p.m.

2:00 p.m. (TCM)— *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939)—Stylishly done version of romance between Queen of England (Bette Davis) and Earl of Essex (Errol Flynn). Directed by Michael Curtiz, from play by Maxwell Anderson. (DW)

2:00 p.m. (AMC)— *Love in the Afternoon* (1957)—Billy Wilder directed this film about the affair between a young Parisian woman (Audrey Hepburn) and a middle-aged American businessman (Gary Cooper). Maurice Chevalier is her father, a private detective. This was Wilder's first film co-written with I.A.L. Diamond. (DW)

3:00 p.m. (Sundance)— *Sliding Doors* (1998)—Charming, likable light comedy hinges on a gimmick that works well: the film shows the two paths the main character's life could take depending on whether or not she misses her train. A vehicle for the talented Gwyneth Paltrow, performing with a flawless British accent. (MJ)

6:00 p.m. (TCM)— *Pride and Prejudice* (1940)—Hollywood's version of the Jane Austen classic about five sisters in early 19th century England. Laurence Olivier is the standout as the proud Darcy; Greer Garson plays the "prejudiced" Elizabeth Bennett. Robert Z. Leonard directed; Aldous Huxley helped write the screenplay. (DW)

11:00 p.m. (Bravo)— *A Face in the Crowd* (1957)—Andy Griffith, in his film debut, as country boy made into a huge television star. With Lee Remick, also in her debut. Directed by Elia Kazan, script by Budd Schulberg (same team as *On the Waterfront).* (DW)

11:00 p.m. (Sundance)— *Sliding Doors* (1998)—See 3:00 p.m.

11:00 p.m. (AMC)— *Battle Cry* (1955)—Raoul Walsh World War II melodrama, about the lives and loves of a group of Marines getting ready for battle, with Van Heflin, Aldo Ray, Tab Hunter and Dorothy Malone. (DW)

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12:30 a.m. (TCM)— *The Champ* (1931)—Wallace Beery is hill boxer and Jackie Cooper his adoring son in this sentimental, but very moving work, directed by King Vidor. (DW)

1:30 a.m. (HBOS)— *The Devil's Advocate* (1997)—Satan (portrayed in an over-the-top performance by Al Pacino) runs a white-shoe law firm in New York City. Keanu Reeves, as an ambitious young lawyer, makes a Faustian bargain and suffers for it. A very funny horror film that trades on the public's distrust of the legal profession. (MJ)

3:15 a.m. (TNT)— *Seconds* (1966)—A middle-aged executive (John Randolph) exchanges his aging body for a new one, and gets a new name and lifestyle in the bargain. A haunting film with many moving moments, especially at the end. Directed by John Frankenheimer in the good years before his decline. Rock Hudson, in one of his best roles, plays the executive after the operation. Stunning photography by James Wong Howe, one of the great Hollywood cinematographers. With Salome Jens and Murray Hamilton. (MJ)

Wednesday, September 22

8:30 a.m. (Cinemax)— *The Razor's Edge* (1946)—An overlong film, with some embarrassingly silly moments, but also some extraordinarily believable ones. With Tyrone Power, looking for the meaning of life, Gene Tierney, Anne Baxter. Directed by Edmund Goulding, from the novel by Somerset Maugham. (DW)

10:00 a.m. (FXM)— *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947)—Gregory Peck is a writer who pretends to be Jewish to gauge anti-Semitism. Moss Hart wrote the relatively tame script; Elia Kazan directed. (DW)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *A Face in the Crowd* (1957)—See Tuesday at 11:00 p.m.

1:00 p.m. (HBO)— *John Grisham's the Rainmaker* (1997)—Francis Coppola took a John Grisham potboiler and made it into an engrossing but pedestrian film. Nonetheless, it is rich in characters, with particularly good work by Danny DeVito and Mickey Rourke (in a surprising stand-out performance as an ultra-sleazy lawyer) Also starring Matt Damon, John Voight and Claire Danes. (MJ)

6:00 p.m. (Showtime)— *Saturday Night Fever* (1977)—A hardware store salesman in Brooklyn becomes a champion disco dancer at night. This is the film that launched John Travolta's film career, and he is a marvel as a dancer. Music by the Bee Gees. Directed by John Badham. (MJ)

8:00 p.m. (FXM)— *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948)—Not Preston Sturges at his best, but still amusing. Rex Harrison is a symphony conductor convinced of his wife's (Linda Darnell's) infidelity. (DW)

9:00 p.m. (HBOS)— *Ulee's Gold* (1997)—See Saturday at 9:15 a.m.

10:00 p.m. (TBS)— *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)—See Saturday at 10:00 a.m.

10:00 p.m. (HBOF)— *Heaven Can Wait* (1978)—Warren Beatty stars as a football player who dies before his time and returns to earth in another body, that of a millionaire businessman. Julie Christie is a social activist who awakens his conscience. With Jack Warden. Directed by Beatty and Buck Henry. Good-natured, but not extraordinarily insightful. (DW)

11:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *Z* (1969)—Fictionalized account of the assassination of Greek liberal politician Gregorios Lambrakis and the government cover-up. Director Costa-Gavras has made this into an ominous, sinister political thriller. With an all-star French and Greek cast headed by Yves Montand. (MJ)

12:00 a.m. (FXM)— *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947)—See 10:00 a.m.

*12:00 a.m. (AMC)— *His Girl Friday* (1940)—Marvelous film version of Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur's *The Front Page*, co-scripted by Hecht, with Cary Grant as scheming editor and Rosalind Russell as his star reporter trying to get married to Ralph Bellamy. Directed by Howard Hawks. (DW)

Thursday, September 23

6:00 a.m. (TCM)— *David Copperfield* (1935)—See Monday at 6:00 p.m.

6:05 a.m. (Sundance)— *Vanya on 42nd Streeet* (1994)—See Saturday at 10:00 a.m.

*7:45 a.m. (Cinemax)— *The Graduate* (1967)—Important coming-of-age film about a young man (Dustin Hoffman, in his first big role) deciding whether to throw in his lot with the adult world. Should he cast off his rebelliousness and join the prospering middle class of the late sixties—i.e., go into "plastics"? Anne Bancroft is the memorable middle-aged seductress (and mother of his fiancee) Mrs. Robinson. Excellent music by Simon and Garfunkel. Directed by Mike Nichols. (MJ)

*8:00 a.m. (HBOS)— *Strangers on a Train* (1951)—See Saturday at 7:30 a.m.

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *Z* (1969)—See Wednesday at 11:30 p.m.

3:30 p.m. (Sundance)— *Vanya on 42nd Streeet* (1994)—See Saturday at 10:00 a.m.

*4:30 p.m. (HBOS)— *Strangers on a Train* (1951)—See Saturday at 7:30 a.m.

6:00 p.m. (Showtime)— *Young Frankenstein* (1974)—See Monday at 8:30 a.m.

*6:15 p.m. (Starz)— *A Merry War* (1998)—An advertising man in 1930s London abruptly leaves his job to become "a poet and a free man." He works in a book shop and lives in squalor, but vows never to give in to the world of money. Richard E. Grant plays the disagreeable Gordon Comstock, and Helena Bonham Carter his patient girlfriend. This witty film version of George Orwell's novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* punctures the pretensions of the British middle class. Directed by Robert Bierman. (MJ)

8:00 p.m. (AMC)— *Gypsy* (1962)—Unfortunate film adaptation of the great Jule Styne-Stephen Sondheim-Arthur Laurents musical. Rosalind Russell does not have the necessary fire in her belly for the role of Mama Rose. Worth seeing for the music, but look for the recent, far better, made-for-TV version with Bette Midler. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Also starring Natalie Wood and Karl Malden. (MJ)

*8:00 p.m. (TNT)— *The Searchers* (1956)—John Ford classic. John Wayne and Jeffrey Hunter search for Wayne's niece, taken by Indians. Natalie Wood plays the girl. An essential American film. (DW)

1:05 a.m. (TNT)— *The Deer Hunter* (1978)—Michael Cimino's somewhat strained portrait of a group of Pennsylvania steelworkers, their experiences in Vietnam and back home again. With Robert De Niro, John Cazale, Meryl Streep, Christopher Walken, John Savage. (DW)

3:00 a.m. (AMC)— *Gypsy* (1962)—See 8:00 p.m.

Friday, September 24

6:00 a.m. (TCM)— *Pride and Prejudice* (1940)—See Tuesday at 6:00 p.m.

7:35 a.m. (Sundance)— *Sliding Doors* (1998)—See Tuesday at 3:00 p.m.

8:00 a.m. (Cinemax)— *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939)—John Ford's account of Abraham Lincoln's early years as a frontier lawyer, starring Henry Fonda. (DW)

*9:00 a.m. (HBOP)— *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985)—See Sunday at 3:30 p.m.

9:00 a.m. (HBOS)— *Ulee's Gold* (1997)—See Saturday at 9:15 a.m.

10:00 a.m. (Comedy)— *Heaven Help Us* (1985)—On-the-mark depiction of life in a Catholic high school in 1960s Brooklyn. With Donald Sutherland, Andrew McCarthy and Wallace Shawn. Directed by Michael Dinner. (MJ)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *Sirens* (1994)—Beautifully photographed, inscrutable tale of sexuality and mythology in a modern, sylvan setting. With Hugh Grant. (MJ)

2:00 p.m. (FXM)— *A Wedding* (1978)—Robert Altman doing what he does best—directing a large ensemble of actors. Carol Burnett stars in this amusing, farcical film. (MJ)

2:00 p.m. (TCM)— *The Tender Trap* (1955)—Likable film, real 1950s fare, about a "swinging" bachelor (Frank Sinatra) and a determined young woman (Debbie Reynolds) out to ensnare him. Charles Walters directed;

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memorable Cahn-Van Heusen title song. (DW)

2:35 p.m. (Sundance)— *Sliding Doors* (1998)—See Tuesday at 3:00 p.m.

3:15 p.m. (Showtime)— *At Long Last Love* (1975)—See Saturday at 4:00 p.m.

6:00 p.m. (AMC)— *What Price Glory?* (1952)—Minor John Ford film, which he transformed from its pacifistic silent original (1926, directed by Raoul Walsh), into "a nostalgic celebration of military camaraderie. With James Cagney, Corinne Calvet and Dan Dailey. (DW)

10:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *Living in Oblivion* (1995)—Sometimes amusing look at the making of a (relatively) low-budget film, with Steve Buscemi as the harassed director. James Le Gros as a spoiled, self-important rising star (allegedly based on director Tom DiCillo's experiences with Brad Pitt) is the highlight of the film. (DW)

*10:40 p.m. (TMC)— *The Big Lebowski* (1998)—A lovable, sprawling mess of a film by the Coen brothers about mistaken identity and bowling. Generally hilarious. With Jeff Bridges, John Goodman and Steve Buscemi. (MJ)

3:30 a.m. (Bravo)— *Living in Oblivion* (1995)—See 10:30 p.m.

4:00 a.m. (FXM)— *A Wedding* (1978)—See 2:00 p.m.

*4:00 a.m. (A&E)— *Night Moves* (1975)—Superior mystery in which a good deal is happening under the surface, and things are not what seem. Gene Hackman plays a weary private eye searching for an actress's spoiled missing daughter. Directed by Arthur Penn. (MJ)

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