



[Vimeo link for this week's film and ALL of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the virtual BFS](#)

[Zoom link for all FALL 2021 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions](#)

The film is available for streaming on Amazon Prime.

Directed by Rob Reiner

Writing Credits William Goldman wrote the screenplay based on his 1973 novel.

Produced by Rob Reiner and Andrew Scheinman

Music by Mark Knopfler

Cinematography by Adrian Biddle

Film Editing by Robert Leighton

The film was selected for the National Film Registry by the National Film Preservation Board, USA, 2016.

Cast

Cary Elwes...Westley
Mandy Patinkin...Inigo Montoya
Chris Sarandon...Prince Humperdinck
Christopher Guest...Count Rugen
Wallace Shawn...Vizzini
André the Giant...Fezzik (as Andre the Giant)
Fred Savage...The Grandson
Robin Wright...The Princess Bride
Peter Falk...The Grandfather
Peter Cook...The Impressive Clergyman
Mel Smith...The Albino
Carol Kane...Valerie
Billy Crystal...Miracle Max
Anne Dyson...The Queen
Margery Mason...The Ancient Boorer
Malcolm Storry...Yellin



Willoughby Gray...The King
Betsy Brantley...The Mother
Paul Badger...The Assistant Brute

Rob Reiner (March 6, 1947, New York City, New York) is an American actor and filmmaker. As an actor, Reiner first came to national prominence with the role of Michael Stivic ("Meathead") on the CBS sitcom *All in the Family* (1971–1979), a performance that earned him two Primetime Emmy Awards. As a director, Reiner was recognized by the Directors Guild of America Awards with nominations for the coming-of-age drama *Stand by Me* (1986), the romantic comedy *When Harry Met Sally...* (1989), and the military courtroom drama *A Few Good Men* (1992), the last of which also earned him a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Picture. Reiner's other major directorial film credits include, his directorial debut, *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), *The Princess Bride* (1987), *Misery* (1990), *North* (1994), *The American President* (1995), *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996), *The Story of Us* (1999), *The*

Bucket List (2007), and *LBJ* (2016). Reiner has also appeared in several of his own films and various others, including *Throw Momma from the Train* (1987), *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), *Bullets Over Broadway* (1994), *The First Wives Club* (1996), *Primary Colors* (1998), *EDtv* (1999), and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013).

William Goldman (August 12, 1931, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.—November 16, 2018, New York City, New York City) was an American novelist, playwright, and screenwriter. He first came to prominence in the 1950s as a novelist before turning to screenwriting. He won Academy Awards for his screenplays *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and *All the President's Men* (1976). His credited screenplays are *Masquerade* (1965), *Harper* (1966), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *The Hot Rock* (1972), *The Stepford Wives* (1975), *The Great Waldo Pepper* (1975), *Marathon Man* (1976), *All the President's Men* (1976), *A Bridge Too Far* (1977), *Magic* (1978), *Mr. Horn* (1979), *Heat* (1986), *The Princess Bride* (1987), *Misery* (1990), *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (1992), *Chaplin* (1992), *Maverick* (1994), *The Chamber* (1996), *The Ghost and the Darkness* (1996), *Absolute Power* (1997), *The General's Daughter* (1999), *Hearts in Atlantis* (2001), *Dreamcatcher* (2003).

Mark Knopfler (12 August 1949, Glasgow, Scotland) is a British singer-songwriter, guitarist, and record producer. He became known as the lead guitarist, singer and songwriter of the rock band Dire Straits. He has composed and produced film scores for nine films, including *Local Hero* (1983), *Cal* (1984), *The Princess Bride* (1987), *Wag the Dog* (1997) and *Altamira* (2016).

Adrian Biddle (20 July 1952, Woolwich, London, England—7 December 2005, London, England) was an English cinematographer who began his film career working with Ridley Scott's advertising company R.S.A. where he worked on many advertisements with Scott and when Scott moved into films, Biddle followed him. On Scott's feature debut,

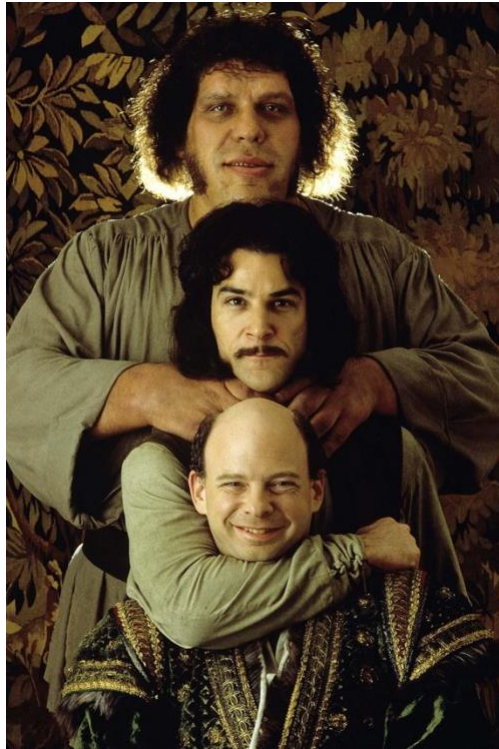
The Duellists (1977), Biddle was working as a clapper loader, before advancing to the position of focus puller on *Alien* (1979). His first director of photography credit is for James Cameron's followup to Scott's 1979 film *Aliens* (1986). His second film as director of photography was *The Princess Bride*

(1987). Overall, he did cinematography for 27 films, including: *Willow* (1988), *Thelma & Louise* (1991), *City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold* (1994), *Judge Dredd* (1995), *101 Dalmatians* (1996), *Event Horizon* (1997), *The Mummy* (1999), *The World is Not Enough* (1999), *The Mummy Returns* (2001), *Shanghai Knights* (2003), *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004), and *V for Vendetta* (2005).

Cary Elwes (26 October 1962, Westminster, London, England) made his acting debut in 1984 with Marek Kaniévsk's film *Another Country*. He went on to play Guilford Dudley in the British historical drama film *Lady Jane* (1986), opposite Helena Bonham Carter. He was then cast as a

stable-boy-turned-swashbuckler Westley in Rob Reiner's fantasy-comedy *The Princess Bride* (1987). He has acted in 134 films and television series, such as: *Glory* (1989), *Days of Thunder* (1990), *Hot Shots!* (1991), *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993), *Liar Liar* (1997), *Cradle Will Rock* (1999), *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000), *The Cat's Meow* (2001), *The X-Files* (TV, 2001-2002), *Saw* (2004), *Ella Enchanted* (2004), *Factory Girl* (2006), *Saw 3D* (2010), *No Strings Attached* (2011), *New Year's Eve* (2011), *Being Charlie* (2015), *The Queen of Spain* (2016), *Stranger Things* (TV, 2019), *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (TV, 2019), and *Family Guy* (TV 2014-2021).

Mandy Patinkin (November 30, 1952, Chicago, Illinois) is a Tony- and Emmy-award-winning American actor and singer known for his work on stage and screen (65 film and television credits). He is best known for appearing as Inigo Montoya in Rob Reiner's 1987 film *The Princess Bride*, as Saul Berenson in the Showtime series *Homeland*, and as SSA Jason Gideon on the crime-drama television series *Criminal Minds*. His other film and television credits include *Taxi* (TV, 1978), *Ragtime* (1981),



Yentl (1983), *American Playhouse* (TV, 1986), *Castle in the Sky* (1986), *Dick Tracy* (1990), *Picket Fences* (TV, 1994), *The Simpsons* (TV, 1995), *The Larry Sanders Show* (TV, 1995), *Homicide: Life on the Street* (TV, 1995), *Lulu on the Bridge* (1998), *The Adventures of Elmo in Grouchland* (1999), *Chicago Hope* (1994-2000), *Piñero* (2001), *Law & Order* (TV, 2003), *Choking Man* (2006), *Everyone's Hero* (2006), *The Wind Rises* (2013), *Wish I Was Here* (2014), *Ali and Nino* (2016), *The Queen of Spain* (2016), *Smurfs: The Lost Village* (2017), *Life Itself* (2018), *The Good Fight* (2021). In 2020, during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, Patinkin and his wife, actress and writer Kathryn Grody, appeared in comforting videos of their domestic life in upstate New York, shot by their son Gideon who posts them to his father's Twitter account, giving needed family warmth and humor to Americans feeling scared and confused.



Christopher Guest (February 5, 1948, New York City, U.S.) is an American-British screenwriter, composer, musician, director, actor, and comedian. He is perhaps best known as the comic mastermind behind several improvised documentaries (he mostly directed and acted in) profiling passionate participants in the worlds of heavy metal (1984's *This Is Spinal Tap*, directed by Rob Reiner), community theater (1996's *Waiting for Guffman*), dog shows (2000's *Best in Show*), folk music (2003's *A Mighty Wind*), film actors reacting to awards-season buzz (2006's *For Your Consideration*), and sports mascots (2016's *Mascots*). He has appeared in 89 films and television series, including countless guest appearances on talk shows as his characters from *Spinal Tap* or *A Mighty Wind*. Here are some of his other performances: *The Hot Rock* (1972), *National Lampoon Television Show: Lemmings Dead in Concert* (1973), *Death Wish* (1974), *Saturday Night Live with Howard Cosell* (TV, 1975), *It Happened One Christmas* (TV Movie, 1977), *All in the Family* (TV, 1977), *Laverne & Shirley* (TV, 1978), *The Chevy Chase National Humor Test* (TV Special, 1979), *Saturday Night Live* (TV, 1984-1985), *The Princess Bride* (1987), *I, Martin Short, Goes Hollywood* (TV Movie, 1989), *Animaniacs* (TV, 1993), *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* (2009), and *The Invention of Lying*

(2009).

Wallace Shawn (November 12, 1943, New York City) is an American actor, voice artist, playwright, and essayist. His film roles have included those of Wally Shawn (a fictionalized version of himself) in *My Dinner with Andre* (1981), which he also wrote, Vizzini in *The Princess Bride* (1987), Mr. James Hall in *Clueless* (1995) and the voice of Rex in the *Toy*

Story franchise (1995–2019).

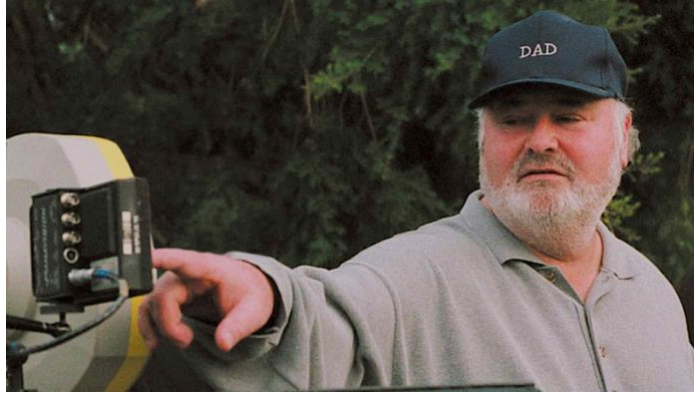
His television work includes recurring roles on *The Cosby Show* (1987-1991), *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999), *Gossip Girl* (2008–2012), and *Young Sheldon* (2018–). He made his film debut in 1979, playing Diane Keaton's ex-husband in Woody Allen's *Manhattan* and an insurance agent in Bob

Fosse's *All That Jazz*. He has appeared in 206 films and television series, including: *Taxi* (TV, 1982-1983), *Radio Days* (1987), *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994), *The Nanny* (TV, 1994), *A Goofy Movie* (1995), *Vegas Vacation* (1997), *Murphy Brown* (TV, 1994-1997), *King of the Hill* (TV, 1997), *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion* (2001), *Sex and the City* (TV, 2004), *The Incredibles* (2004), *Family Guy* (TV, 2001-2011), *Adventure Time* (TV, 2013), *BoJack Horseman* (TV, 2014), *The Good Wife* (TV, 2013-2015), *Mozart in the Jungle* (TV Series, 2014-2018), *The Simpsons* (TV, 2019), *Marriage Story* (2019), *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (TV, 2017-2019), *Search Party* (TV, 2020), *Waiting for Godot* (2021), and *The Good Fight* (TV, 2018-2021).

Fred Savage (July 9, 1976, Chicago, Illinois) is an American actor and television director, known for his role as Kevin Arnold in the American television series *The Wonder Years* (1988 to 1993). During this period, he appeared in several films, such as *Vice Versa* (1988), *Little Monsters* (1989), and *The Wizard* (1989). He is also known for playing the Grandson in *The Princess Bride* (1987).

Robin Wright (April 8, 1966, Dallas, Texas) is an American actress who first gained attention for her role in the NBC Daytime soap opera *Santa Barbara* from 1984 to 1988. She then made the transition to film, starring in *The Princess Bride* (1987). This role led her to further success in the film industry, with

starring roles in films such as *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Message in a Bottle* (1999), the superhero drama-thriller *Unbreakable* (2000), the historical drama *The Conspirator* (2010), *Moneyball* (2011), *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), *Everest* (2015), *Wonder Woman* (2017), and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). Wright starred as Claire Underwood in the Netflix political drama streaming television series *House of Cards*, for which she won the Golden Globe Award for Best Actress in 2013, becoming the first actress to win a Golden Globe for a streaming television series. She has appeared in 61 films and television series. These are some of her other appearances: *Moll Flanders* (1996), *White Oleander* (2002), *Beowulf* (2007), *New York, I Love You* (2008), *A Christmas Carol* (2009), *Enlightened* (TV, 2011), *Justice League* (2017), *Wonder Woman 1984* (2020), *Zack Snyder's Justice League* (2021), and *Where All Light Tends to Go* (filming).



Peter Falk (September 16, 1927 in New York City, New York—June 23, 2011, Beverly Hills, California) at the age of three, was diagnosed with a tumor behind his right eye and, in an emergency operation, both the tumor and the eye were removed. He wore a glass eye for the rest of his life. The resultant disability made for a precarious school life, compensated for by his defiant humor. One particularly funny anecdote was once when he was playing in a Little League game, the umpire called him out. Falk thought that he was safe. He pulled his glass eye out of its socket and handed it to the umpire, telling him, “Here, I think you might need this.” Unable to serve in the navy because of his eyesight, he enlisted in the merchant marines, working as a cook. After obtaining a Master’s in Public Administration from Syracuse University, he took a job as an efficiency expert in Hartford for the Connecticut budget bureau. By his late 20s, he knew that he had to escape financial administration. His big-screen debut came in Nicholas Ray's ecological adventure *Wind Across the Everglades* (1958), but with his city accent and nifty, method-oriented style he soon specialized in playing hoodlums in films including *Pretty Boy Floyd* (1959) and *Murder Inc* (1960), the latter attracting great attention for his powerful performance as a vicious killer. It earned

him an Oscar nomination as best supporting actor, and he became the first person to be nominated for an Emmy within the same year, after playing a heroin addict in the television drama *The Law and Mr. Jones*. In 1961, Frank Capra remade his classic *Lady*

for a Day as *A Pocketful of Miracles*, which earned Falk a second Oscar nomination. The following year, he received an Emmy for his performance as a truck driver in *The Price of Tomatoes* (1962). Although he had come to acting late, within a few years he established himself as a

significant presence. He joined his friend Jack Lemmon when the actor decided to produce Murray Schisgal's play *Luv* for the screen. Sadly, the result was a dismal movie farce. A couple of other duds led to a lull in Falk's career, until he heard that Bing Crosby had turned down the part of a detective in a scheduled television show. At the age of 40, Falk landed the part, making his debut as Columbo in the pilot episode, “Prescription Murder”. When a series was proposed he declined, preferring to work with John Cassavetes and to return to the stage in Neil Simon's *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*. Eventually NBC convinced Falk to sign on for six episodes. The actor even provided the clothing from his own wardrobe, including the famous raincoat. Later he observed that the dogged, working-class detective sprang from his own personality: “He’s obsessive, relentless, meticulous about his work and definitely not a good dresser.” Falk became deeply involved with the production, whose format was distinctive in that the murder was shown at the outset, making the mystery for the viewer not a matter of identity, but of explanation. He contributed ideas and directed two episodes, “Blueprint for Murder” and “Etude in Black”. Between 1971 and 1978 he starred in 40 episodes, becoming the highest paid actor in television in the process. Falk managed to escape the straitjacket, or in his case shabby raincoat, of typecasting. Falk was also known for his collaborations with filmmaker, actor, and personal friend John Cassavetes in films such as *Husbands* (1970), *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), *Opening Night* (1977), Elaine May's *Mikey and Nicky* (1976) and the Columbo episode “Étude in Black” (1972). Falk's movie career became increasingly busy and varied. He returned to the stage in David Mamet's

challenging *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1986) and Moss Hart's *Light Up the Sky* (1987). He was the storyteller-grandfather in the whimsical *The Princess Bride* (1987) and took the lead in an enjoyable remake of a Claude Lelouch film retitled *Happy New Year* (1987). In Wim Wenders's 1987 film *Wings of Desire*, Falk played a semi-fictionalized version of himself, a famous American actor who had once been an angel, but who had grown disillusioned with only observing life on Earth and had in turn given up his immortality. Falk described the role as "the craziest thing that [he'd] ever been offered." In 2005 he had a street renamed after him in his hometown of Ossining, New York. To unveil the "Peter Falk Place," he pulled off a trademark raincoat covering the sign.



Peter Cook (17 November 1937, Torquay, Devon, England—9 January 1995, Hampstead, London, England) was an English satirist and comedic actor. Referred to as "the father of modern satire" by *The Guardian* in 2005, Cook was ranked number one in the Comedians' Comedian, a poll of more than 300 comics, comedy writers, producers, and directors in the English-speaking world. He was a leading figure of the British satire boom of the 1960s, and he was associated with the anti-establishment comedic movement that emerged in the United Kingdom in the late 1950s. As a student at Cambridge, he became involved with the Footlights Club, a drama group at Cambridge, of which he later became president. After graduating he created the comedy stage revue *Beyond the Fringe*, beginning a long-running partnership with Dudley Moore. In 1961, Cook opened The Establishment, a club at 18 Greek Street in Soho in central London, presenting fellow comedians in a nightclub setting, including American Lenny Bruce. In 1965, Cook and Moore began a television career, beginning with *Not Only... But Also*. Cook's deadpan monologues contrasted with Moore's buffoonery. Following the success of the show, the duo appeared together in the films *The Wrong Box* (1966) and *Bedazzled* (1967). Cook and Moore returned to television projects continuing to the late 1970s, including co-presenting *Saturday Night Live* in the

United States. From 1978 until his death in 1995, Cook no longer collaborated with Moore, apart from a few cameo appearances but continued to be a regular performer in British television and film. Overall, he has 51 film and television appearances. Here are some other highlights: *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1978), *The Secret Policeman's Ball* (TV Movie, 1979), *Blackadder* (TV Series, 1983), *Supergirl* (1984), *The Princess Bride* (1987), and *Great Balls of Fire!* (1989).

Carol Kane (June 18, 1952, Cleveland, Ohio) is an American actress and comedian. She became known in the 1970s and 1980s in films such as *Hester Street* (1975), for which she received an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress, *Annie Hall* (1977), and *The Princess Bride* (1987). She

appeared on the television series *Taxi* in the early 1980s, as Simka Gravas, the wife of Latka, the character played by Andy Kaufman, winning two Emmy Awards for her work. From 2015 to 2020, she was a main cast member on the Netflix series *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*. She has acted in 164 films and television series. Here are some of her other performances: *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), *The Last Detail* (1973), *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), *The World's Greatest Lover* (1977), *When a Stranger Calls* (1979), *The Muppet Movie* (1979), *Great Performances* (TV, 1978-1981), *Norman Loves Rose* (1982), *BBC2 Playhouse* (TV, 1982), *Laverne & Shirley* (TV, 1982), *Over the Brooklyn Bridge* (1984), *Cheers* (TV, 1984), *The Secret Diary of Sigmund Freud* (1984), *Transylvania 6-5000* (1985), *Ishtar* (1987), *Scrooged* (1988), *Flashback* (1989), *My Blue Heaven* (1990), *Joe Versus the Volcano* (1990), *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1993), *Addams Family Values* (1993), *Seinfeld* (TV, 1994), *Chicago Hope* (TV, 1995), *Trees Lounge* (1996), *Man on the Moon* (1999), *My First Mister* (2001), *Family Guy* (TV, 2001), *Monk* (TV, 2009), *Ugly Betty* (TV, 2010), *Sleepwalk with Me* (2012), *Girls* (TV, 2013), *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (TV, 2009-2013), *Halt and Catch Fire* (TV, 2017), *Los Espookys* (TV, 2019), *Big Mouth* (TV, 2019), and *Hunters* (TV, 2020-2022).

Billy Crystal (March 14, 1948, New York City) is an American actor (72 credits), comedian, director, producer, writer and television host. He gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s for television roles as Jodie Dallas on the ABC sitcom *Soap* and as a cast member and frequent host of *Saturday Night Live*. Crystal then became a Hollywood film star during the late 1980s and 1990s, appearing in the critical and box office successes *Rabbit Test* (1978), *Running Scared* (1986), *The Princess Bride* (1987), *Throw Momma from the Train* (1987), *Memories of Me* (1988), *When Harry Met Sally...* (1989), *City Slickers* (1991), *Mr. Saturday Night* (1992), *Analyze This* (1999), and *Parental Guidance* (2012). He provided the voice of Mike Wazowski in the *Monsters, Inc.* franchise, and *Cars* (2006). These are some of his other film and television appearances: *All in the Family* (TV, 1976), *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), *Faerie Tale Theatre* (TV, 1985), *Sesame Street* (TV, 1986-1988), *The Larry Sanders Show* (TV, 1992), *City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold* (1994), *The Critic* (TV, 1994), *Hamlet* (1996), *Friends* (TV, 1997), *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), *My Giant* (1998), *America's Sweethearts* (2001), *The Bernie Mac Show* (TV, 2002), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), *I'm Still Here* (2010), *The Comedians* (TV, 2015), *The Comedian* (2016), and *Modern Family* (TV,



2017).

Peter Bradshaw: “The Princess Bride review—golden-age throwback glows brighter than ever (*The Guardian*, October 23, 2017)

After 30 years, the wit, fun, charm and idealism are fresher than ever. *The Princess Bride*, adapted by William Goldman from his novel and directed by Rob Reiner, now makes a brief reappearance in UK cinemas. Catch it while you can. My colleague Hadley Freeman has a magisterial chapter on it in [her memoir of 1980s Hollywood, *Life Moves Pretty Fast*](#), showing how it made possible fairytale homages and *Shrek* and *Frozen* and also affected the language of irony and comedy in the television pop culture that came afterwards. It’s a

movie that manages to be both a pastiche and a fervently real love story. *The Princess Bride* is an organically grown comedy romance from an analogue age: different from the genetically modified, digital creations that came along later. And there is a specific kind of poignancy given how two of its stars have since achieved new fame in TV dramas of cynicism and disillusionment: Robin Wright with *House of Cards* and Mandy Patinkin in *Homeland*.

Cary Elwes plays the impossibly handsome farmhand Westley who is devoted to the beautiful, headstrong young noblewoman who capriciously bosses him about on her country estate: this is the whimsically named Buttercup, beguilingly played by Wright. They fall in love, but are instantly sundered by a political conspiracy planned by the deplorable Prince Humperdinck (Chris Sarandon), who has his own designs on Buttercup’s person, and his loathsome attendant Count Rugen (Christopher Guest). Westley and Buttercup are also to encounter the cynical plotter Vizzini (Wallace Shawn) but they also find two true friends: hot-headed Spanish swordsman Inigo Montoya (Patinkin) and the man-mountain Fezzik, lovably and unselfconsciously played by the 7ft 4in wrestler André the Giant.

The comedy has something of Douglas Adams, Monty Python and Mel Brooks, but Reiner and Goldman ensure that the gags and comedy style are always lightly handled, laugh-lines delivered modestly, and all subordinate to a story told absolutely straight. It’s an adventure which reaches back to golden-age Hollywood and the devil-may-care world of Douglas Fairbanks or Tyrone Power playing Zorro, or Errol Flynn playing Robin Hood.

Perhaps the most striking thing now about [The Princess Bride](#) is the framing device: it’s a story being told by a kindly grandfather, played by Peter Falk – but to a little boy, not a little girl. There isn’t the same gender stereotyping you’d find if the story were pitched today, and despite the title, *The Princess Bride* is not a tweeny sleepover movie like *Frozen*. Buttercup is not indulged with lonely monologues, and there is no great interest in how she feels. What counts with her is bold and resourceful action.

The location work and production design are wonderful and the funny situations are glorious: it’s an inspired moment when poor Buttercup disappears into quicksand and Westley dives in to save her – and we, the audience, are left up at ground level, tensely wondering what can be happening down there. It’s a nutritious pleasure to see *The Princess Bride* back on the big screen.



Jonathan Haynes: “My favourite film: The Princess Bride” (The Guardian, November 9, 2011)

Fittingly enough, the first time I saw [The Princess Bride](#) I was languishing in bed with flu. Bizarrely, that's an ideal state for a tale which begins with a grandfather determined to read a proper story to a similarly sickly boy.

At first glance an opening scene of a child playing a computer game and the entrance of [Peter Falk](#), looking inescapably like Columbo, even without the cigar and overcoat, does not bode well. One's own scepticism at what is to come is mirrored by the boy's uncertainty over the prospect of his grandfather reading from a book. "Has it got any sports in it?" he asks warily. "Are you kidding?" asks Columbo. It has "fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes, true love, miracles ..."

And so it does, and from then on we are in the world of Buttercup and Westley, of Prince Humperdinck and the Dread Pirate Roberts, of Vizzini, Fezzik and Inigo Montoya. It's an enchanting land of silly names and sillier dialogue and sillier-still cameos. But all this silliness is underscored by soaring themes – true love, ultimate suffering and the all conquering power of friendship – not to mention a score by Mark Knopfler that punctuates the climaxes with perfect comic timing.

The plot is a fairytale with a twist. Buttercup (Robin Wright) realises she's in love with the farm boy Westley (Cary Elwes) – he sets off to find his fortune in order to marry her. Five years later he's presumed dead, killed at the hand of the Dread Pirate Roberts, and Buttercup is to marry Prince Humperdinck of Florin, for reasons which are never really explained (but you won't find it matters). Before her wedding, however, Buttercup is kidnapped by the unlikely trio of a Sicilian tactician, a giant and a Spanish master swordsman. A mysterious masked man in black pursues them and bests the three kidnappers by skill, strength and wit in turn. This man

in black then unveils himself to Buttercup as the Dread Pirate Roberts. And then as Westley, her true love. (Keep up.)

The simple farmhand has matured into a daring buccaneer – there's a good hint of Alexandre Dumas's [Edmond Dantès](#) about Westley – and developed an eye for the one-liner. On Buttercup contemplating stabbing herself in the heart, he quips: "There's a shortage of perfect breasts in this world. It would be a pity to damage yours." But this is barely the start. Onwards, to the Fire Swamp (with the flame spurts, the lightning sand and the Rodents Of Unusual Size) and onwards again, to capture, betrayal, torture and revenge, to cameos by Peter Cook, Mel Smith, Billy Crystal and Wallace Shawn and most importantly to the story of Inigo Montoya.

When Inigo was just 11, his father, a sword-maker, was killed by a six-fingered man. Inigo swore revenge and for 20 years has sought out that six-fingered man. When he finds him [he will say](#): "Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die." Repeatedly. Beautifully played by [Mandy Patinkin](#), the gravity of Inigo's story rubs against the comedy of other story threads, and this is part of the genius that runs throughout The Princess Bride. For every amusing aside there is a seriousness alongside. It tells a very sweet story without ever straying into mawkishness or sickliness.

William Goldman's screenplay does most of the heavy lifting (his other work includes All The President's Men and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid) while director Rob Reiner (of This Is Spinal Tap) gleefully throws out any attempt at realism. The sets are shoddy – rocks have rarely looked more like polystyrene than the rocks at the top of the Cliffs of Insanity, the stunts ludicrously executed – for Westley's gymnastics while fighting Inigo the stunt double would have looked no less incongruous if dressed in a pink leotard, and the overall continuity seems wilfully absent. Never has the sky changed so much as in the short distance from the Cliffs to the Swamp. Between filming in County Clare and Derbyshire we've gone from summer sunshine to fake studio skies to a cold and greying autumn.

Reiner doesn't seem to care though, and neither do I. This is fantasy: we can happily suspend disbelief. Undoubtedly, there are better films, but as one to return to time and again, never waning in its charms and enchantment, it is – in the words of the criminal genius of Sicilian origin, Vizzini – "inconceivable" I could pick another as my favourite. If you are ever asked if you want to watch the [The](#)

[Princess Bride](#), there can be but one answer: "As you wish."



James Beardinelli (*filmcritic.com*, 1987)

"My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

When William Goldman wrote those words, he did not intend for them to become a fragment of '80s pop culture. When Mandy Patinkin spoke those words, he didn't expect his every inflection to be endlessly mimicked. And when Rob Reiner directed those words, he had no idea that kids and young adults everywhere would be repeating them. Nevertheless, there's no doubting that nearly every movie-going American is familiar with those three short sentences. Reiner has stated that, along with "I'll have what she's having" and "You can't handle the truth," this represents one of the three most often quoted excerpts of dialogue from his movies.

It's an odd line to mimic, especially taken out of context. For example, you can't go in to your boss looking for a raise and state, "My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die." Chances are, you're not going to get that pay hike. Likewise, when meeting a date, the best choice of an opening is not, "My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die." Nevertheless, even though there is no practical use for this dialogue snippet, that hasn't dimmed its popularity.

But those lines are only a *very* small part of what makes *The Princess Bride* such a special motion picture. And, for those who crave features that can be enjoyed by every member of the family (grammar school kid, teenage troublemaker, tough-to-please twenty-something, beleaguered mom and dad, and grumpy grandparents), there may be nothing better than this motion picture, which celebrates fairy tales and true love with its tongue firmly planted in its cheek. This is what happens when stories of heroism

and derring-do collide head-on with a Monty Python sensibility. Best of all, despite its satirical bent, *The Princess Bride* can still be enjoyed on the simpler level of the story of a princess being rescued by her one true love.

The Princess Bride is constructed as a story-within-a-story, with the framing scenes occurring in the "real world" as a grandfather (Peter Falk) stops by to read a story to his sick grandson (Fred Savage). During these scenes, Reiner makes a statement about the value of books over electronic forms of entertainment. When the grandfather arrives, his grandson is playing a video game, a blank expression on his face. But, once the story takes flight in his imagination, he is absorbed and transfixed - transported to another time and place in a way that even the best electronic game cannot accomplish.

The primary narrative, which evolves as the grandfather reads it (and occasionally interrupts it to intersperse comments or skip over boring parts), takes place in the magical land of Florin, and tells of the true love between peasant girl Buttercup (Robin Wright, years before marrying Sean Penn) and stablehand Westley (Cary Elwes). After declaring their unending affection for each other, they are separated, and Westley is reported dead. Buttercup, cold-hearted and stone-faced after her loss, is chosen by the crown prince, Humperdinck (Chris Sarandon), to be his bride. Humperdinck's motives, however, are not pure. He intends to arrange for Buttercup's abduction, frame rival country Guilder for her murder, and start a war with the backing of the common folk, who love their princess-to-be. To this end, he hires three rogues to capture Buttercup: the wily Sicilian Vizzini (Wallace Shawn), who fancies himself to be the smartest man in the world and has a fondness for the word "inconceivable;" the giant Fezzik (Andre the Giant), who is dumb, kind-hearted, and humungous; and the swordsman Inigo Montoya (Mandy Pantankin), who is scouring the world in search of the six-fingered man who killed his beloved father.

Vizzini, Fezzik, and Inigo kidnap Buttercup one day when she's out riding. Heading for the Guilder/Florin frontier, they spirit her away by boat. Hot on their trail is the ship of the Dread Pirate Roberts (a.k.a. The Man in Black). He pursues them to the Cliffs of Insanity, where he engages in a duel of steel with Inigo, a wrestling match with Fezzik, and a match of wits with Vizzini to win Buttercup. Once she is in his custody, he reveals himself to be Westley. Fleeing Humperdinck and his lackey, Count

Rugen (Christopher Guest), Buttercup and Westley enter the dreaded Fire Swamp, where the ROUS (Rodents of Unusual Size) are only one of the dangers. And, once they get out, there's still Humperdinck to deal with. Fortunately, Westley and Buttercup are not without allies. Fezzik and Inigo have joined them, and there's also help from a wizened old dwarf named Miracle Max (Billy Crystal), who harbors no love for Humperdinck or Rugen.

For director Rob Reiner, *The Princess Bride* represented the fourth of seven consecutive commercial and critical successes (a streak that began with 1984's [*This Is Spinal Tap*](#) and ended with 1992's *A Few Good Men*).



The tone owes more to *Spinal Tap* than to any of Reiner's other outings. It is witty and irreverent without ever going so far over-the-top that it turns the proceedings into camp. Reiner manages the difficult yet ultimately rewarding task of creating a movie that simultaneously parodies a genre while also celebrating and participating in it. At the instance of *The Princess Bride*'s most satisfying emotional climax (it has something to do with Inigo), the applause accorded the moment is heartfelt and genuine. Despite the satirical edge and the fantastic setting, we come to care about these individuals.

The film is based on the book by William Goldman, who wrote his own screenplay adaptation. Before Reiner (backed with financing from his old "All in the Family" buddy, Norman Lear) came along, Goldman had been trying for 15 years to get the movie made. (At one point, Norman Jewison was attached to the project.) After watching *Spinal Tap* and *The Sure Thing*, Goldman decided that Reiner was the man for the job. Years later, he would comment that he was only fully satisfied with the motion picture versions of two of his scripts: [*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*](#) and *The Princess Bride*.

The average family film is targeted primarily at children, with a few elements thrown in to go over the youngsters' heads and appeal to their parents. (Many Disney films fit into this category.) The crafting of *The Princess Bride*, however, is superior. Nearly every aspect of the film delights all potential viewers. The sword fight between Inigo and Westley,

for example, offers equal thrills to 7-year olds and 37-year olds (although the verbal repartee that accompanies the physical struggle will resonate more with older viewers). Incidentally, that particular sequence, arguably the best screen fencing battle in film history (including those from the likes of Errol Flynn and Douglas Fairbanks), is notable for its lack of stunt doubles. All of the action (except a couple of

acrobatic flips) is performed by the actors, not stunt doubles. Mandy Patankin and Cary Elwes studied for months to be able to pull off this struggle convincingly.

Everyone who has seen *The Princess Bride* has a favorite scene, and it's a testimony to the film's start-to-finish strength that nearly every minute of the movie's running length is on

someone's list. The candidates are wide and varied, ranging from the Inigo/Westley swordfight to the battle of intelligence with Vizzini to the Pit of Despair to the visit to Miracle Max's to the storming of the castle and the duel with the six-fingered man. There is little, if anything, in *The Princess Bride* that doesn't work. Reiner hits all the right notes, and it would be impossible to achieve a better overall tone.

There isn't a bad casting choice, either. Robin Wright and Cary Elwes were selected as much for their good looks as for their acting ability, and they prove to be a superior romantic couple. Wright, despite being California bred, affects a flawless British accent. Elwes is equally at home with comedy, action, and drama. Mandy Patankin, playing Inigo, matches Elwes' athleticism and develops a character who is instantly sympathetic (despite initially being a "bad guy"). Andre the Giant represents the mighty Fezzik as a lovable brute, and Wallace Shawn is hilarious as the egotistic Vizzini, whose end is inconceivable. Chris Sarandon elevates Humperdinck's pomposity to amazing levels, and Christopher Guest underlies Rugen's cowardly ways with a sense of the sinister. The Billy Crystal/Carol Kane cameo offers some of *The Princess Bride*'s biggest guffaws. (Reportedly, Reiner had to leave the set during the filming of these scenes, because Crystal's ad-libs were causing him to laugh so hard he was becoming nauseated.)

Although children generally appreciate *The Princess Bride*'s pseudo-fairy tale narrative and

action-oriented approach, much of the dialogue is designed for adults. Mostly credited to Goldman (except the Crystal ad-libs), it's brilliant stuff. The quips traded by Inigo and Westley during their duel are as impressive as the actual swordsmanship. Vizzini's double-talk about which cup is poisoned (during the battle of wits) needs to be listened to several times before it begins to make twisted sense.

Since its release more than 15 years ago, *The Princess Bride* has often been copied, but never

equaled. Perhaps the most successful movie to capture its essential spirit was the animated *Shrek*. The word "brilliant" is often overused in the movie business, but this is one of those occasions when it is warranted. *The Princess Bride* is an unparalleled achievement ? a modern classic that will be enjoyed for generations to come. It has been called the "Generation X's version of *The Wizard of Oz*," and, more than any other description, that comes the closest to identifying this movie's impact.

THAT'S IT FOR THE FALL 2021 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS 43.

We'll post the screening list for BFS 44 in a few weeks.

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