

Caruso wants good guys to win



THE BOSS: Bruce Springsteen is about to release his first album in three years. "The Ghost of Tom Joad" is scheduled to hit music stores Tuesday, Nov. 21.

By JEFF STRICKLER Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune

David Caruso is tired of the bad guys overshadowing the good guys. It's happening much too often in movies these days, he thinks. Look no further than "Batman Forever," in which Jim Carrey and Tommy Lee Jones outdazzled Caped Crusader Val Kilmer; the "Candyman" thriller, in which Tony Todd's monster was the star, or even "Congo," in which the best actor was the mechanical ape.

Caruso thinks it's time that the good guys step forward. He hopes to do that in the mystery thriller "Jade," as a district attorney trying to solve a murder case.

"It's easy for a bad guy to be colorful," he said during an interview in Chicago to promote the film. "No rules apply to him. He's given free rein to be self-indulgent, and the audience is easily drawn to him. It's a challenge to play the good guy. And I welcome the challenge."

Caruso figures he knows the key: "You make him as dangerous as the bad guy. It has to do with the choice between right and wrong. When you choose the wrong way, and you know in your heart that it's the wrong way, then you are dangerous."

To supply that tension, Caruso talked director William Friedkin into adding a scene: The district attorney is checking out a murder when he discovers a cufflink bearing the emblem of a prestigious club. Instead of turning it over to investigators, he hides it.

It's an act that raises all sorts of questions in the viewer's mind. Is he protecting someone? Does he plan to use the cufflink to trick the suspect? Or is that he doesn't trust the police? Caruso feels that adds a crucial layer of intrigue to his character.

"But I had to fight for that," he said. "It meant a lot to me. It's not ego-based in that I wanted something that was wrong for the film just because it was good for me. I think it was good for the film."

(By the way, Friedkin also added a scene later in the movie to resolve the cufflink issue. "You have to," Caruso said. "One of the oldest rules in drama is that if you introduce a gun in the first act, it better go off by the third act. It's the same with hidden cufflinks.")

It's not surprising that Caruso, who rocketed to stardom via TV's "NYPD Blue," would argue for changes in a script. He has a lot of opinions about filmmaking. And he's willing to put his money where his mouth is — literally. His next film is a drama titled "The Insider" that he will produce as well as star in. He makes it clear that he doesn't plan to play it safe by following cliched formulas.

"We're at a time when we're tossing out expertise in filmmaking to go for the lowest common denominator," he said. "Hollywood is a service town. It will churn out whatever people will buy."

(Distributed by Scripps Howard News Service.)



David Caruso, during his 'NYPD Blues' days.

'93 file photo

'Frontline' finds incompetence, not conspiracy, in Waco tragedy

By ROBERT BIANCO Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

There are stories that demand our attention, even when we'd rather not give it.

"Frontline" opens its 14th season tonight with just that kind of story: "Waco — The Inside Story." "Lord knows," says correspondent Peter Boyer (of the New Yorker), "we all think we know a lot about what happened at Waco" — and so we do. But apparently, thanks to a cache of files discovered in the basement of a Texas law firm, Boyer and "Frontline" know more. Their promise tonight at 9 is to tell us "the real story of the Waco standoff."

Though the story is hardly comforting, it is — despite the current howls of militia-man nuts — more one of incompetence than conspiracy. Watching "Waco," one gets the feeling that the possibility of a good outcome was pretty much doomed from the start, in large part because David Koresh's definition of a "good outcome" closely resembled the outcome he got.

The most controversial aspect of "Frontline's" report may be its

assertion that the FBI lied to Attorney General Janet Reno to get her to approve its plan of attack on the Branch Davidian compound. According to Frontline, the FBI told Reno children were being abused at Waco, even though it knew they were not.

That revelation is hardly the only piece of bad news for the FBI in "Waco." Stymied by Koresh, and caught up in the emotional pressure of the siege, the FBI apparently took a number of foolish risks that, in retrospect, turned out to have fatal consequences.

"Waco," however, is not simply an indictment of the government; it's a study of the tragedy that can result when we try to apply rational standards to irrational situations. (FBI agents, for example, dismissed the danger of fire because they assumed the Davidians would leave the compound should a fire break out.) In the end, the greater sins at Waco seem to have been committed by Koresh, who, says Boyer, lured the FBI "into a course whose obvious dangers they could not see. Their greatest failure was that they let him write the final act." It's a failure for which those

children paid dearly. Elsewhere, cruising the new season:

• If you haven't watched CBS's Monday night sitcom "Can't Hurry Love" since the first episode (or at all), you may want to check it out. It still isn't what you'd call appointment television, but it has developed into a genuine small pleasure, mostly because star Nancy McKee has made her character a model of scraping-by blue-collar dignity.

Improvement is also visible over at CBS's Sunday effort "Almost Perfect," where star

Nancy Travis has, thankfully, toned her act down some. In Sunday's episode, her character found herself regretting her decision to sleep over at her boyfriend's house — a pre-fab furnished flat with a waterbed ("You know what they say about waterbeds," "Far out, man?"), noisy neighbors, and an all-night

tennis court next door. In the pilot, Travis was mostly annoying; in this episode, she actually hit endearing.

What will CBS do? I don't know. I'm glad I just have to criticize the decision, and not actually make it.

• Saturday's debut of Fox's "Mad TV" was mildly amusing,

but the show's main claim to fame seems to be just that it's more amusing than the current

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