

Falling Down (1993)

MATT CHRISTIANSEN (/MATT'S-MOVIE-REVIEWS?AUTHOR=5C37A9623EB1EA28442009DF) · AUGUST 6, 2022



I'm just trying to get home for my little girl's birthday.

THE SUMMARY: A struggling ex-defense engineer divorcee abandons his car in deadlocked LA traffic, marches through the city to get to his daughter's birthday party, and ruthlessly punishes anybody who puts obstacles in his way. A genuinely underrated masterpiece, it's like the Marvin Heemeyer 'Killdozer' story (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marvin_Heemeyer) on foot with more offensive jokes: a critical look at the factors that push a man beyond reason, and a cautionary tale about what happens when we abandon morality in pursuit of revenge.

FROM MOVIE-PICKER DEREK: A great Michael Douglas film. A good movie that came out in 1993 - it still says a lot about the world today.

THE BEST:

- **Remove a man from his family, and watch the world burn:** A man without purpose is a dangerous thing. Through family, all of a man's power is focused to constructive efforts - building a home, providing value for that home, and a stable upbringing for the next generation. Multiplied thousands or millions of times, that's the single brick that builds the rest of society. When you remove a man from that purpose though, all of those capabilities get re-focused on destruction, as they do for Bill.

It's not entirely clear in this movie whether Bill's separation from his family is justified or not. It's mentioned he has anger problems, but his wife is clear he never physically abused her. What is clear is that if we are too aggressive in separating men from their families, we achieve more harm than we do safety. If we have to err in either keeping dysfunctional families intact, or

empowering single motherhood and the erasure of the father through the iron fist of the state, I'll take a few more bitchslaps of questionable justification.

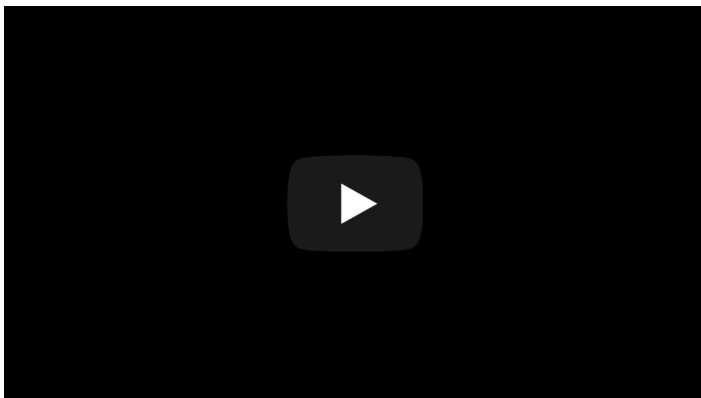
Bill is a villain, that's true - but he's also a warning. If we don't want guys like him, don't create them by severing the family.

- **Be careful with a vengeful mindset:** The prior point isn't intended to exonerate Bill, though. He commits several heinous crimes. Many of his actions are justified responses to direct aggressions - baseball-batting the cholos in self-defense, or harshly questioning the panhandler, for example - but many more of acts are aggressions of his own he perceives as justified acts of revenge against a broader society that has wronged him.

It all culminates with Bill's arrest, when he asks 'I'm the bad guy? How'd that happen?' It happens much the same way his breaking point happened - small injustices adding up to a big one. By allowing ourselves the moral lenience to abuse others in small ways because they 'deserve it' or because we have power over them and won't face consequences, we start the process of erasing moral integrity and boundaries. If small abuses are okay, over time, larger abuses are normalized.

I would call this distinction the difference between justice and vengeance. Justice is a virtue, and must be pursued according to moral boundaries. Vengeance is a vice that often has no moral boundaries at all. Without those moral boundaries, like Bill, we can lose the ability to tell when we have actually become the abuser ourselves.

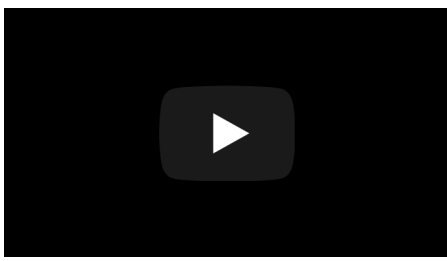
- **The opening traffic scene also made me want to go on a rage march:** The traffic opener is a perfectly relatable tone-setter. I became enraged just watching it and recalling my days stuck in Seattle and San Francisco traffic. The scene is an excellent portrayal both of how annoying small things like traffic jams, screaming kids, persistent flies, and the rest can be individually, but how all added up, they can cause a good man to go mad. It's also an excellent metaphor for the broader theme of the movie: don't think you can mistreat a man in small ways and avoid those things adding up to consequences.



The opening traffic jam

- **Perfectly spicy:** Falling Down was uh... ethnically hilarious throughout. The initial frustration with the Korean shop owner, the confrontation with the Hispanic gangsters, but nothing was funnier than the encounter with the Army-Navy surplus store owner. The entire scene from the mockery of the gay couple (alternate lifestyle, my ass!) through Bill's murder is a cavalcade of comedy. His commentary about the differential between Whammyburger's advertising and their actual customer demographics, his used can of Zyklon B, all hilarious - but it's the little things that count. Did you notice his collection of Nazi erotica (pictured below)? *Swastika Bitches* and *Hellcats of the Reich* - maybe when Susan finally bans us, Blonde can pursue a new career path by reviving these publications.

Also, shoutout to the 'we are dying of AIDS' hobo. No reason, really - it's just funny.



Alternate lifestyle, my ass!



I think *Swastikunts* is more clever, but good enough.



He is dying of AIDS.

- **It properly bumped *Groundhog Day* at the box office:** Fun fact/trivia about *Falling Down*: it bumped *Groundhog Day* from the top box-office spot (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falling_Down#Box_office) when it was released in February 1993. I make this point for no purpose other than further digging at those who won't let me get away with thinking *Groundhog Day* is just an okay movie (<https://www.mattchristiansenmedia.com/matts-movie-reviews/2021/6/3/groundhog-day-1993>). Movie-goers in 1993 knew my movie opinions are the correct movie opinions, and made their viewing selection accordingly.

THE WORST:

- **I'd like a little more backstory:** Most of Bill's frustrations are merely alluded to or described second-hand. We don't get specific explanations or depictions of why he was fired, why the divorce happened, where he's been going during the day since his firing, and other important questions that would help the viewer understand his character better, and help judge whether his actions are justified or not. And since understanding how small injustices add up to a rage rampage is a broad theme of the movie, additional clarity could be helpful for that purpose as well.

However, in no way do I think the mysteries ruin the movie. It provides enough detail to allow you to fill in the gaps yourself, and shows frequent instances of Bill trying to do the right thing, and still getting abused for it. And in a movie that's designed to be a presentation of a single day in continuity, it makes sense that there wouldn't be flashbacks or forced recitations of timelines where it doesn't fit conversationally between characters.

THE RATING: 5/5 Wickies. I laughed, I came as close to crying as a movie outside of *The Lion King* could make me, and most importantly, I thought a lot about moral complexities later. Plus, Bill's short-sleeve shirt, tie, pocket pens and an Uzi make for a great Civil War 2 look. I'll keep this loadout option in mind for the coming Great Gay War (<https://twitter.com/LoriLightfoot/status/1523844510735908864>).



5 Wickies

YOUR RATING: Vote here ↓