

Access Content from Anywhere, on Any Device. Ultra Fast Streaming. 24/7 Support. [OPEN](#)

Target Number One Review: Maple Express

by **Pat Mullen** | July 20, 2020, 8:04 pm

Canadian cinema gets its answer to *Midnight Express* in *Target Number One*. The comparison between Alan Parker's 1978 Oscar winner and Daniel Roby's new thriller seems inevitable. However, where *Midnight Express* tells the true story of Billy Hays (Brad Davis), who saw his charges for heroin possession upgraded to smuggling with a life sentence in prison as a result, Roby's film is a tale of Canuck corruption. Both dramas feature young men facing ludicrously harsh sentences for drug-related crimes. Each film is ripped from the headlines with *Midnight Express* telling the true story of Billy Hays (Brad Davis), who saw his charges for heroin possession upgraded to smuggling with a life sentence in prison.

Hays' story proves worthy inspiration for Roby's tale about Daniel Léger (**Antoine Olivier Pilon**). *Target Number One* sees Léger locked in a Thai slammer when the Canadian Federal Police (not named as the RCMP) concoct a bizarre sting operation. The feds frame Léger, a low-level drug addict, as the kingpin of Vancouver's drug smuggling scene. However, where *Midnight Express* involves a dated case of "othering," *Target Number One* turns its critical gaze homeward. This taut and slickly entertaining film is a gripping saga of the Canadian police system run amok. What a relevant tale this is.

True Crime Inspiration

The film draws inspiration from the 1989 case in which Montrealer **Alain Olivier** faced the death penalty in Thailand. *Globe & Mail* journalist Victor Malarek (**Josh Hartnett**) fuels the parallel narrative, pursuing the story to his editor's chagrin. While Hartnett's journo draws more overtly from his true counterpart, Pilon's renamed character doesn't hide his inspiration. (Olivier and Malarek both receive credit for their participation in the making of the film.) What results are two equally compelling narratives that are equally essential to the story.

Roby unfolds the drama with a non-linear timeline that recounts both Léger and Malarek's stories. Léger's journey brings him to B.C. following six months of sobriety and a month of honest work. Some unfair events lead Daniel to a shady drug dealer, Glen Picker (Jim Gaffigan), who sees an opportunity and offers him a room and a job. Picker is a blunder idiot worthy of *L. Tanya*. Unfortunately, everyone affords him the utmost serious, including Daniel, who goes along with Glen's dope-smuggling fish stories.

Advertisements

Besides the naively trusting Daniel, the feds take Picker's word as a star informant. Agent Frank Cooper (**Stephen McHattie**) desperately seeks a scoop having been passed over for a promotion. He puts blind faith in Glen's word that he can deliver the top guy in B.C.'s drug scene. The case hits at the height of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush's war on drugs. The pressure's on the Canucks to contribute *something* to the dog and drug mule show, and Daniel looks to be it. McHattie, channelling the darkness seen earlier his year in *Dreamland*, creates an ugly villain that evokes the larger systemic poison that rigs the justice system. The film benefits from its release's coincidence with thundering chorus of calls for police reform and should add to the conversation.

Piecing the Puzzle

The storyline with Malarek occurs slightly later chronologically as the journalist questions the case's sketchy details. He asks rosy questions of the feds and riles up Thai officials. His nose, reared on seasoned, on-the-ground, investigative journalism knows when an absence of facts tells a different story. The dual threads gradually align as Malarek pieces the case together. Roby gently reveals the connections without complicating the drama. The quick and precise editing by Yvann Thibaudeau lets the complementary narratives unfold like a Rubik's Cube coming together with each shard of *Target Number One* ratcheting up the tension as characters collide.

Roby makes an impressive step up as a director, delivering the kind of commercial cinema to which Canada often aspires, but too rarely achieves. Drawing upon his mega-success with the Quebecois hit *Louis Cyr* and the big-budget spectacle of *Just a Breath Away*, the film has a distinct Canadian character in addition to muscles worthy of Hollywood. This handsomely shot and tightly crafted thriller grabs the audience for 135 adrenaline-pumping minutes.

Target Number One is Midnight Express meets Spotlight

The film also finds two solid leads in Pilon and Hartnett. Pilon, best known for his performance in **Xavier Dolan's** *Mommy*, delivers on the expectations of his breakthrough work. His Daniel is a lost boy, a directionless youth lured by cheap thrills and driven by terrible judgment. Where many prison drama leads might emphasize a character's strength, Pilon favours Daniel's vulnerability. Even before the young man steps foot in the Thai prison, he's in way over his head. This sentiment invites empathy while underscoring the gross injustice his true-life counterpart faced as an easy scapegoat. Hartnett similarly reminds us why he was a top star at Pilon's age and demonstrates his maturity as an actor. It's refreshing to see him create a lived-in character, while letting a journalist like Malarek be a heartthrobby leading man.

Advertisements

Target Number One provides great entertainment while also doing justice to the story it tells. On the heels of 2020's ripped-from-the-headlines facepalm, *Run This Town*, which dramatized former Toronto mayor Rob Ford's crack-smoking scandal, *Target Number One* offers a rebound for the Canucks as a true story done right. *Run This Town* infamously erases *Toronto Star* journalist Robyn Doolittle and credits a rookie white guy for breaking the story. However, *Target Number One* doesn't make the same mistake. It honours the risk-takers at the heart of its story, and the thrills come as much from Malarek's pursuit of the truth as from Léger's quest for freedom. The film owes as much to *Spotlight* as it does to *Midnight Express* with its celebratory portrait of old-school investigative journalism. It's a tough and hugely entertaining drama about homegrown Canadian scandals seen too rarely. More people should be talking about it.

TARGET NUMBER ONE IS NOW PLAYING IN VANCOUVER, QUEBEC, BRITISH COLUMBIA, ALBERTA, NOVA SCOTIA AND NEW BRUNSWICK WITH EXPANSION TO FOLLOW IN LINE WITH THEATRE RE-OPENINGS.

ENHANCED BY Google

ADVERTISMENT

by TELUS

Bring home safety and convenience with ADT by TELUS.

Learn more about our smart home security and 24/7 professional monitoring.

Explore plans

TWITTER - @THATSHelf

That Shelf

ICYMI: Spoiled Rotten Episode 109 - REVISITING SPAWN
<https://thatshelf.com/spoiled-rotten-109-revisiting-spawn>

On the latest episode of @TDFSpilled co-hosts @TheYingGuard & @DMPlatypus revisit #spawn! #Podcast #ThatShelf

Twitter

That Shelf

Final Fantasy VII Remake Part 2 in Full Development
<https://www.consolecreatures.com/final-fantasy-vii-remake-part-2-in-full-development/>

Twitter

Spoiled Rotten Podcast

Are @TheYingGuard & @DMPlatypus the only ones who didn't realize #spawn has no daughter? Listen to the full episode on @ThatShelf for more revelations: <https://thatshelf.com/spoiled-rotten-109-revisiting-spawn/>

Twitter

Load More...

POPULAR POSTS

- When Does Season 3 Of Barry Start?
- Horoscopes: The Top 10 Pisces Season Movies
- Target Number One Review: Maple Express
- Hot Docs At Home - What To Watch This Week
- 15 Best Revenge Movies Of All Time
- Spike Lee's David Byrne's American Utopia To Open TIFF
- Star Trek: Discovery's Depiction Of Captain Pike's Disability Is A Betrayal Of Roddenberry's Utopian Vision
- From Right To Left: Ranking The Politics Of Superheroes

ADVERTISMENT

