

**The Guardian.** Directed by Andrew Davis (who?). Starring Ashton Kutcher, Kevin Costner... and that's all she wrote though I'm assuming all the guys in it who can't act (aside from John Heard) are real Coast Guard guys.

Heartbreak of the Top Gentleman Jane's Gun Ridge. Shake. Stir. Let sit in pan overnight. And sit and sit. Screen at room temperature. This flick about a smart alec who wants to be a [supply name of] but who struggles with crusty old burnout [supply name of] then faces a daunting initiation in [supply name of] while at the same time juggling a casual or maybe not sexual ree-lation with a [supply name of] until a Walpurgisnacht during [supply name of] affirms the one and dethrones but manly and amicably the other and cee-ments passion of the incidental fee-male [supply name of] who gets lifted up and carried out of the [supply name of predicament/job/attitude] to accompaniment of old rock tune [supply name of] usurps about every formula for coming of age/atonement with the past/eee-lite service unit flicks since *The Halls of Montezuma* with Richard Widmark as a chemistry professor (or is that one *Shores of Tripoli*... get those two mixed up; also the last time a college professor ever served in Armed Forces). That's not to say that formula movies don't work... only that this one don't. The formula served epic poetry for centuries. Why doesn't it serve here? Dunno. Maybe this thing is too simple and yet not simple enough. Epic heroes don't learn. They don't have dimensions. Who the hell else would be a hero except somebody too simple to be complicated? The complicated ones teach chemistry...urf! urf!

One of the probbles here is the depiction of Coast Guard culture (Bonus question: What was *last* movie to feature Coast Guard?). I kinda expect my Coast Guard to be out there patrolling the offshore waters for tunas in drag nets not trolling the offpost bars for tunas in tight jeans. I kinda admired the Coasties on account of *didn't* do that stuff. No doubt in my mind that there's plenty of tough guys in the Coast Guard; it's just that the image that outfit cultivates is not the clean-out-the-bar, snag-the-poutylips-highcheekbones-tightjeans-schoolteacher (and we all know that the bars are fulla *them* and how predictably they prefer dumba tumescent yet dedicated service squirrels with short lease on life and no permanent residence to stable if overweight provider stock-options insurance agents with receding hairline, bank account, and Lexus see-dan). Worsen yet, in the big barfight scene, the Coasties kick butt in a roomful of Swabbies. You can bet *that* scene gonna get replayed for the cheap seats and that some poor bozo out of Woods Hole gonna shed teeth over Kevin Costner's vanity. Unbelievably, the boast Benjamin Randall (Costner) makes—longtime champion rescue swimmer, holder of every record at Coast Guard Swimmer School (read: Top Gun, Parris Island, BUDS, Scylla, Charybdis, and Hogwarts all rollt into one), and dee-vor-cee on account of lockt in a same-sex ree-relationship with Triton—is that the (ptui!) *other* services (those pansies in the Navy, Marine Corps, Army) think they're bad on account of they do (ptui!) *combat*... whereas the Coast Guard takes on Mother Nature: “When the Navy shuts down, we go out!” Might wanna stay out of the Blue Oyster for a coupla months, fellas, till this blows over.

Anyhow. Here's the story ...though you've seen it before. Cham-peen swimmer Jake Fisher (Kutcher, doing best he can to act tormented wiseapple) arrives at Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer School determined “that others may live” (your jump-in-the-water

heroes are big on those hortatory subjunctives) but harboring a, like, dark secret (his father was a worthless enlisted juicer... no, wait, that's *Officer and...*), way all your pretty boy stud self-sacrificing wannabes do; between him and his objective, though, stands stood down living legend Ben Randall, now the head honcho in charge NCOIC and chief master chief of instructors, who he too also for his part nurtures a dark secret (his father died in a secret mission off the Oriskany... no, wait, that's *Top Gun...*). Clash of the dark secrets. Ben's wife has dumped (his true love is the Corps... no, wait, that's *Heartbreak...*) him on account of he's a hero and good guy and no woman has to sit still for *that*; the bar hopping tight jeans high cheekbones pouty lips schoolteacher (like aren't they all?) Kutcher tackles on a bet (*Top Gun...*) won't commit to him on account of he's an "eighteen-week hotshot" with no future (*Officer and...*) although she *will* umph umph his little umph umph till his eyes bug out (...wha'd you say the name of that bar is?). And we're off. Struggles in the pool: one guy can't do the underwater stuff (*Officer and...*). Will our guy help him out? Reconciliation with the wife or not (*Heartbreak...*)? Oh, yeah... and who's this "Guardian"? Just as in *Top Gun*, the movie really ends when the curmudgeonly instructor and the young hierophant reconcile, but like *Heartbreak*, too, we have a coda tacked on where it's, like, the real thing: air combat toe-to-foe with the Rooskies; Grenada; Irak (*G.I. Jane*). And who'd you say this "Guardian" is? But, don't forget that *unlike* those weenies in the (ptui!) *other* services, we don't do (ptui!) combat, so it'll have to be, like, a whoa! bigass storm: towering waves, whipping winds, foundering yawls and stuff and some more of those bonehead fisherman who don't know when to put in. Here (finally) is where the guys who made the flick (in their folly) decide to embroider (at their peril) on the trope. Who's the Guardian? Go rent *The Cid*. And don't bother to rent this one.

Ans: *Onion Head*. Andy Griffith, Walter Matthau. 1958. It was time...