

**My memory is terrible when it comes to quotes. I've got dozens of favourite excerpts from books and movies, but every so often I discover that what I actually remember is only a close approximation of a message conveyed by originally spoken or written sentences.**

But shortcomings of my brain – although definitely an interesting subject on its own – won't be this column's main theme. It's just that I recently discovered that I got another quote quite wrong. The question on the screen of the terminal depicted in the last article was meant to be a nod to one of my most favourite movies of all time. Still, I'm not sure if anybody at all got the connection, because the exact quote should read nothing other than "Shall we play I game?"

That movie is, of course, 1983's excellent "WarGames," starring young Matthew Broderick as a computer maniac who accidentally phones up a wrong machine and launches (no pun intended) chain of events which could potentially lead to World War III. I can't recall when I've first seen it (here goes my brain deficiency again), but I immediately and immensely loved it and to date its last minutes always have me on the edge of my seat.

The story of my first encounter with another movie, "Sneakers" from 1992, is somewhat different. I remember seeing trailers and on-

the-set documentaries/teasers (it might have even been the first motion picture I consciously wanted to go to the movies to see), the great amounts of anticipation, and a slight confusion after the first showing – the movie was a little bit more lighthearted than I imagined, yet its points were as valid as those given by "WarGames." But it grew on me with the repeated viewings (after it premiered on Sky Movies I remember seeing almost every single airing of it) and soon, being able to quote half of the movie from memory, I realised that if this isn't my favourite movie, then I have no idea what a favourite movie is.

As with "WarGames," it might not have been a masterpiece by any means, but the overall result was far more than satisfying. The ensemble was awesome (including a surprising James Earl Jones' cameo), the music stylish and distinctive (alas, not so distinctive anymore, as James Horner practically copied himself in both "Bicentennial man" and late "A beautiful mind"), the premise – a group of security experts getting involved in a very dangerous game of espionage and codebreaking – quite interesting and the execution practically flawless.

Ten years from the premiere of "Sneakers," and nearly two decades after "WarGames" hit the big screen, it's obvious that both movies are looked upon quite differently. The portrayed technology is certainly obsolete, although the nostalgia for all those

old-school terminals, vector monitors, acoustic modems, magnetic tapes, 8" floppy disks, text interfaces and classic telephone tricks only makes the movies more appealing to my eyes (and did I mention that I'm going to make an exact replica of WOPR one day and have it put in my living room?).

# Spy games and war games

One might laugh not only at the ubiquitous antiquities, but also at the surrounding reality. The supremacy of Russian empire, present in both movies, is long but forgotten and I don't think it could still send shivers down anybody's spine. But we should realise that the movies actually captured the spirit of respective times rather well; the fear of nuclear war in the '80s and all threats emerging from the next decade's birth of the information era. Both visions – a badly programmed machine causing annihilation of the human race and Cosmo collapsing entire countries just from behind his monitor screen – were equally terrifying and mindprovoking.

That is not to say that the movies are without flaws at all. One can't help but at least smile at all the inconsistencies and simplifications, and the notion of believing in keyless encryption half a century after the spectacular failure of Enigma is as laughable and far-fetched as world's most powerful warfare simulator learning strategies from a game of... tic-tac-toe.

Still, "WarGames" and "Sneakers" manage to redeem themselves in other ways. They both share a somewhat romantic (and very welcome) approach to computers and hacking, they both show us god-like devices we dreamt of having (or just having existed) when we were kids and at the same time keep distance and warn us about the limited trust we should put in machines. What's more, who never wanted to find out a best kept secret, or to have their own little "boys' club," stand alone against a powerful enemy and – ultimately – win and prove themselves right? And finally, who never wanted to become Lightman, Cosmo or Bishop, even if for a day?

If you never did, you probably won't ever

understand why I love these movies so much. You might wonder how come I consider them better than last year's "Swordfish," which – although certainly a nice high-octane action movie – seemed just as a simple vehicle to show three things: breathtaking explosion scene, John Travolta sporting a goatee and Halle Berry's... parity control, so to speak (at least the way they did credits was fabulous). Or "Matrix," again a cute movie, but definitely a "been there, done that" experience. Or plain dumb "Hackers." Or the colourful special effects fest known as "The lawnmower man." Or the other so-called "cult movies," none of them succeeding in capturing my imagination so much as the crusades of David or Marty.

Last, but not least, is the fact that both "WarGames" and "Sneakers" were written by the same pair of people, namely Lawrence Lasker and Walter F. Parkes. Maybe I should've mentioned that at the very beginning, but I actually – to my unending surprise – made the connection myself only yesterday, already halfway through this article. I don't know how such an essential fact could've escaped me for so long, but this only made the recent discovery far more significant, proving that the slight feel of similarity I felt for so many years wasn't only my imagination.

So who knows, maybe my brain isn't as bad after all?

**by Marcin Wichary**

