

## The Ten Absolute Worst Journalists in the Movies

By [Silas Valentino](#), [Danny King](#) Monday, July 13, 2015



**Long gone are the days when depictions of reporters in movies** were reduced to a fedora with a white “Press” card tucked into the bow. We have Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman in *All The President’s Men* and Peter Finch’s [epic cry](#) of “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take this anymore!” to validate the vocation as represented on film. But not every journalist on the big screen presents the profession in an admirable light. In [Trainwreck](#), out this Friday, Amy Schumer plays a magazine reporter who ends up wining/dining/sleeping with her profile subject — an indisputable no-no for anyone who has ever seen their name appear as a byline. But Schumer’s character isn’t alone: Dozens of journalist portrayals in film are hokey, unflattering, or laughably wrong (expense accounts? Ha!). It’d take a far longer, more robust list to document every single example of shabby journalism in the movies, but these ten are the *worst*:



**10. Chelsea Brown (Rosario Dawson) in *Top Five* (2014)**

Chelsea Brown manipulates her interview subject by not being truthful about her identity. In the movie, Chris Rock's Andre Allen, a well-known stand-up turned dramatic actor, has long been beset by a faceless nemesis known as James Nielson, a *New York Times* critic who has written unfavorably about Allen in the past. Well, it turns out that Dawson's Chelsea Brown, a reporter assigned to profile Allen, is also (are you ready for this?) James Nielson! Not only does this twist strain credibility, it throws an unappealing wrench into a movie that is mostly a breath of fresh air — a pleasant walk-and-talk/hangout-ish tour through New York City, led by these two wonderful actors.

*Notable crime against journalism:* Making a perfectly fine movie more confusing.



**9. Josie Geller (Drew Barrymore) in *Never Been Kissed* (1999)**

Drew Barrymore's Josie Geller bastardizes the concept of undercover reporting. No one expected Barrymore to be a modern Nellie Bly in this teen flick, but she didn't have to go and vomit all over Cameron Crowe's *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* experience (in which the reporter-turned-director famously spent a year immersed in a California high school). But alas, she takes to heart her editor's orders to befriend the popular crowd ("party with them, rave with them, and get 'jiggy' with them") and eventually become the student body's queen bee.

*Notable crime against journalism:* Goes undercover for the *Chicago Sun-Times* solely to assuage her own childhood insecurities.



**8. Richard Thornburg (William Atherton) in *Die Hard* (1988)**

Richard Thornburg gets so caught up in snagging a fresh take on a boiling, developing story of L.A. terrorism that he forgets his decency in the news van. He produces a segment that shows protagonist John McClane's children, which leads to the bad guys identifying McClane's wife, which ultimately causes more trouble. At the end of the film Mrs. McClane smacks William in the face — the appropriate rebuttal that no comments section post could ever match.

*Notable crime against journalism:* Involving the victim's kids just to boost ratings. The nerve!



**7. Gwen Pearson (Tara Reid) in *National Lampoon's Van Wilder* (2002)**

Reid's Gwen Pearson is a bad journalist because of that tacky montage scene at the end of the film where her profile on Van Wilder is narrated. In no way, shape, or form was a *National Lampoon* movie going to approach accuracy, but *Van Wilder* is indicative a recent trend in movies featuring reporters: A feel-good, first-person narrative goes into overdrive toward the end, steamrolling over any semblance of a passable journalism with a smarmy happy ending.

*Notable crime against journalism:* Writes overemotional and hammy profile fit for any desperate college newspaper opinion section.



**6. Sue Charlton (Linda Kozlowski) in *Crocodile Dundee* (1986)**

Sue Charlton not only falls in love with her subject, Mick Dundee, but also forces *Newsday* to waste an ungodly amount of money catering to him: To quote Roger Ebert, "She spends more money on this story than most newspapers earmark for a gubernatorial election." And Ebert's observation doesn't even take into account the fact that [a] Charlton's father owns *Newsday* and [b] she's dating her editor. This is disappointing not just for its uninspired portrayal of journalistic behavior but for its sloppy rendering of a career-minded reporter who just can't help but fall under the spell of a rugged adventurer. But maybe that's reality seeping in: During filming, Kozlowski and Paul Hogan, who played Dundee, began dating and eventually married (they divorced in 2013).

*Notable crime against journalism:* Putting up Dundee at the Plaza Hotel. Really.



**5. Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) and J. Jonah Jameson (J.K. Simmons) in *Spider-Man* (2002)**

Peter Parker is a bad photojournalist because his one assignment tends to be photographing his own alter ego. All his shoots are pre-planned, manipulated events that he orchestrates for his personal gain. His pictures are worth a thousand malapropisms! And J.K. Simmons as J. Jonah Jameson, Parker's blustering editor at the *Daily Bugle*, is bunk for antagonizing Spider-Man in an attempt to contrive each story to fit whatever he deems the most sellable. Plus, no respectable editor-in-chief dons that sort of flattop haircut.

*Notable crime against journalism:* The scene where Spider-Man creates a web to hold his camera so that he can snap more photos of journalistic injustice. With great power comes great marketability.



**4. Stephen Glass (Hayden Christensen) in *Shattered Glass* (2003)**

Hayden Christensen is bad simply because, well, he's playing Stephen Glass, "the motherfucking scumbag journalist who made up stories for the *New Republic*" (to quote Michael Musto, writing in the *Voice* in 2003). Fabrication is his crime, but what the movie captures best is the utter deflation of finding out that you were wrong after putting your faith in someone.

*Notable crime against journalism:* An unacceptable reliance on fiction.



### **3. Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway) in *Network* (1976)**

Always in pursuit of the ratings, even if they lead her into the crypts of humanity, Faye Dunaway's Diana Christensen first shows her malice to us with a docudrama on the fictional Ecumenical Liberation Army (a radical group inspired by the Symbionese Liberation Army). But her lust for higher ratings continues. She exploits Peter Finch's Howard Beale into acting as the “mad prophet of the airwaves,” which successfully trivializes and belittles any attempt at broadcasting the truth.

*Notable crime against journalism:* Responsible for killing a man because of lousy ratings.





**2. M.J. Major (Jada Pinkett Smith) in *Return to Paradise* (1998)**

M.J. Major breaks the golden rule of journalism: Never get your sources hanged. As *Paradise* (directed by the gifted Joseph Ruben) enters its courtroom climax, the sense is that Joaquin Phoenix's character, Lewis McBride (who is on trial in Malaysia for hash possession), will eventually be released from prison. But when the judge discovers a scandalous newspaper article about the case written by one M.J. Major (by the way, what a name!), he takes his anger out on Lewis, who is promptly put to death by hanging.

*Notable crime against journalism:* An article she writes triggers an unwarranted execution.



**1. Louis Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal) in *Nightcrawler* (2014)**

Louis Bloom, a rail-thin crime-scene videographer with an ~~unhealthy~~ unparalleled drive for success, has no ethics. This isn't to say that the people around Gyllenhaal's Bloom are just peachy — news director Nina Romina, played by the great Rene Russo, is as calculating and ratings-hungry as Bloom, her new freelancer, is sociopathic. But Bloom is in a league of his own. He propositions Nina for sex; records footage of a deadly home invasion without informing the police; and hires a financially strapped assistant (Riz Ahmed) who will come to wish he never met Bloom.

*Notable crime against journalism:* There is blood on his hands — and he doesn't mind.