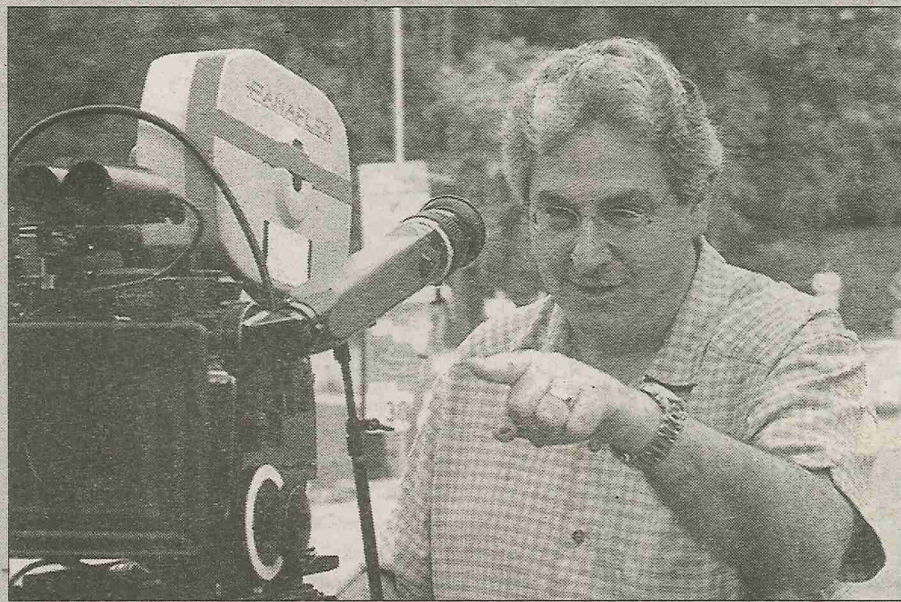


## DIRECTOR'S CUT: HAROLD'S HARVEST OF HUMOR



COURTESY OF FOCUS FEATURES

Director Harold Ramis steps behind the camera on the set of his new flick *The Ice Harvest*. Currently, Ramis is working with Owen Wilson on a film due in 2006.

Groundhogs, moose and gophers find their way into hilarious roles in three films by Harold Ramis, one of Hollywood's most successful writers and directors. His credits include *National Lampoon's Animal House*, *Ghostbusters* and, most recently, *The Ice Harvest*.

### The Director

Born in Chicago on Nov. 21, 1944, Ramis grew up in a Jewish-American home and attended college at Washington University in St. Louis. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1966. After college, he worked as a mental ward orderly until he launched his comedy career as a joke writer for *Playboy*. He also wrote for Chicago's Second City comedy troupe and *The National Lampoon Radio Hour*.

Ramis soon proved himself a Hollywood success as the writer of the cult classic *National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978) and the director of the off-the-wall flick *Caddyshack* (1980). Since then, Ramis has acted in many of his own works including *Ghostbusters* (1984) and *Ghostbusters II* (1989), in which he plays Dr. Egon Spengler.

### The Style

Ramis' protagonists are typically oddball characters. For example, *National Lampoon's Vacation's* Clark Griswold (Chevy Chase) will drive to Wally World, "the best theme park on earth," no matter what the cost, and *Caddyshack's* Carl Spackler (Bill Murray) has an unhealthy obsession with killing a gopher.

As a testament to Murphy's law, anything and everything bad happens to Ramis' characters at the most inopportune moments. Viewers watch them work through their problems using crazy antics. In *Groundhog Day*, Phil Connors (Murray) tries to jump off a building and lies on railroad tracks so he won't have to relive the same day.

### The Essentials

A gopher wreaks havoc at an exclusive golf course in *Caddyshack* (1980). All young caddy Danny Noonan (Michael O'Keefe) wants is a college scholarship, but this proves difficult when he meets an insane groundskeeper (Murray), a rich, eccentric club member (Chevy Chase), a snooty judge (Ted Knight) and an over-the-top real estate mogul (Rodney Dangerfield).

In *Analyze That* (2002), the sequel to Ramis' *Analyze This* (1999), mobster Paul Vitti (Robert De Niro) forces Dr. Ben Sobel (Billy Crystal) to be his psychiatrist. Unfortunately, Dr. Sobel's own life is turned upside down with the stresses of a new marriage, a teenage son and his new mobster boss.

Recently, Ramis departed from his lighthearted norm in the new thriller *The Ice Harvest* (2005). Audiences can bet, however, that this comedian won't let them leave theaters without a couple of laughs.

— MICHELLE DUMONTIER

## TAKE ONE

Here is a bite-sized review you can use before you make your movie choice this weekend. It's some reel advice. Use wisely.

## The Ice Harvest

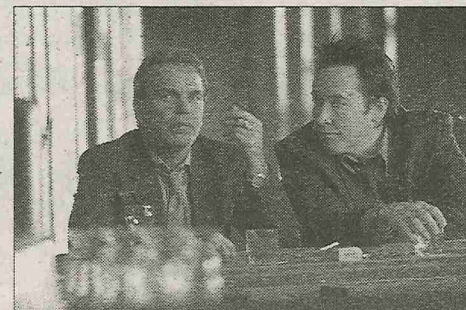
Kansas isn't Dorothy's and Toto's innocent, home sweet home anymore. *The Ice Harvest* introduces audiences to a different Kansas.

The movie begins with Charlie Arglist (John Cusack) solemnly explaining to the audience that he and colleague Vic Cavanaugh (Billy Bob Thornton) stole \$2 million from the Wichita mob on Christmas Eve. Vic hides the money in an unknown location and instructs Charlie to act normally for a couple of hours until they can safely make their escape on Christmas day.

Charlie's evening is anything but normal as the sordid side of Wichita's nightlife unfolds. He steals a photo of a politician caught in a compromising position with a strip club manager and encounters a corrupt cop.

*The Ice Harvest's* lack of comedy is surprising because director Harold Ramis has achieved great success in the genre. He co-wrote *Caddyshack* and *National Lampoon's Animal House*. The thriller aspects of *The Ice Harvest* are dark but contribute to the plot's originality. The film deserves praise for being unique.

The movie's few laughs are courtesy of Pete Van Heuten (Oliver Platt), Charlie's bar buddy and his ex-wife's new husband. Pete's drunken state puts him in humorous situations that make audiences laugh out loud. But after Charlie takes



COURTESY OF FOCUS FEATURES

Vic (Billy Bob Thornton) and Charlie (John Cusack) plot their escape from Wichita.

Pete home, the comedy quickly ends.

The rest of the movie is grim. Five gory murders and frequent displays of tasteless female nudity paint a depressing picture of Christmas morning, and the holiday tunes in the background seem out of place and sardonic.

The recurring phrase, "as Wichita falls, so falls Wichita falls," perpetuates the gloomy atmosphere. It first appears on the strip club's bathroom wall and refers to Wichita's slide into irreparable desolation as crime escalates. By the end of the film, both the audience and the movie's criminals are ready to leave Kansas.

— NISA KORTE

Wait for video

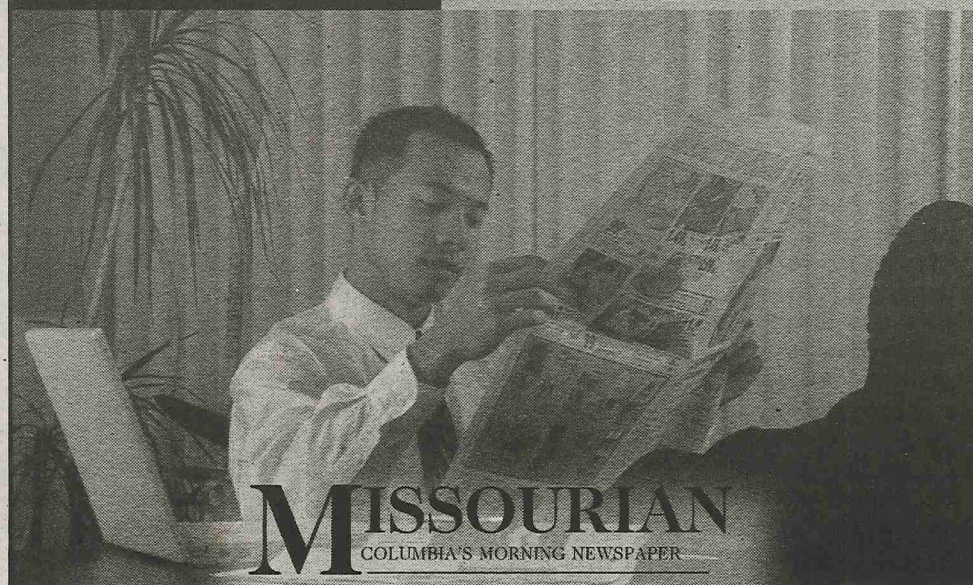
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