**The Little-Known Story of How *The Shawshank Redemption* Became One of the Most Beloved Films of All Time**

**A dud at the box office when it opened 20 years ago this week, *The Shawshank Redemption* now perennially tops IMDb’s favorite-movies list—the ultimate in “guy cry” cinema. A story of studio maneuvering, big paychecks deferred, and well-earned roof suds.**

by [Margaret Heidenry](http://www.vanityfair.com/vf-hollywood/contributor/Margaret-Heidenry)

September 22, 2014 9:10 am

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by Mary Evans/Ronald Grant/From Everett Collection.

The odds of a successful jailbreak are never good. On a night in April 2012, they were all but impossible for Chen Guangcheng: one blind Chinese dissident against the 100 guards surrounding his home and village in Shandong province. Political activism against the Chinese government had earned Chen six years of what he called “brutal” detainment—translation: regular beatings—first in prison and later under house arrest. And so, to escape, the 40-year-old Chen waited for a moonless sky, and then scaled the government-built wall around his house, relying on his other senses to guide him across rivers and roads. Three hundred miles later—at one point he was reduced to crawling after breaking bones in his foot—the fugitive reached his sanctuary: the American Embassy in Beijing.

The story of the blind man eluding a domestic-security apparatus with an annual budget of $111 billion “electrified China’s rights activists,” according to *The New York Times*. The embarrassed country’s Internet police tried to squelch the story by censoring micro-blogs, an information-sharing platform in China similar to the government-banned Twitter. Blocked search terms included “blind person,” “embassy,” and “Shawshank.”

Twenty years ago this week, *The Shawshank Redemption* hit multiplexes. It’s a period prison drama with stately, old-fashioned rhythms, starring Tim Robbins as Andy Dufresne, wrongfully convicted of killing his wife, her lover and serving two life terms, and Morgan Freeman as fellow lifer “Red” Redding, who narrates the film. But the 90s were an era of booyah action movies starring the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis. In *Shawshank*, the story of a decades-long quest for redemption and freedom, the closest things to action sequences involve fighting off buggery or defiantly blasting a Mozart duettino. Reviews were mostly favorable, but the film bombed, failing to earn even $1 million on its opening weekend and eventually eking out $16 million (about $25 million today) at the American box office during its initial release, not nearly enough—and even less so after marketing costs and exhibitors’ cuts—to recoup its $25 million budget.

That was then. Today *The Shawshank Redemption* tops the IMDb’s Top 250 cinema-favorites list with more than a million votes, having passed the previous champ, *The Godfather*, in 2008. *(While* The Godfather*—trailing by 300,000 votes—has maintained its runner-up position,* Citizen Kane*, the perennial greatest movie ever in critics’ polls, whispers “Rosebud” from No. 66.) Readers of the British movie magazine* Empire *voted* The Shawshank Redemption\* No. 4 in a 2008 list of “the 500 Greatest Films of All Time,” and in 2011 the film won a BBC Radio favorite-film poll.

Morgan Freeman relies on less empirical evidence. “About everywhere you go, people say, ‘*The Shawshank Redemption*—greatest movie I ever saw,’ ” he told me. “Just comes out of them.” Not that he’s a disinterested observer, but Tim Robbins backs his co-star: “I swear to God, all over the world—*all over the world*—wherever I go, there are people who say, ‘That movie changed my life.’ ” Even the world’s most famous former prisoner connected with the movie, according to Robbins: “When I met [Nelson Mandela], he talked about loving *Shawshank.*”

How did a period prison film running 142 minutes—a life sentence for most audiences—become a global phenomenon capable of rankling a world superpower and stirring a Nobel Peace Prize winner? To borrow a quote from *Shawshank*, “Geology is the study of pressure and time. That’s all it takes, really. Pressure and time.”



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Writer-director Frank Darabont now owns a Spanish villa in Los Angeles’s Los Feliz district—Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie also call the neighborhood home—which serves solely as his bustling production office. But in the 1980s, before his Oscar nominations and his stints as creator and executive producer of the AMC series *The Walking Dead* and the TNT series *Mob City*, Darabont was just another broke Hollywood hanger-on imagining his name on the back of a director’s chair. “I had no career whatsoever. I was nailing sets together on low-budget films to keep body and soul together,” he says. But Darabont, a “rabid and devoted” Stephen King fan, nursed a chimera: turning one of the writer’s stories into a film.

Not many novelists have seen their work sail past as many movie-studio gatekeepers as King, starting with 1976’s blood-soaked hit *Carrie*. The author famously hated director Stanley Kubrick’s adaptation of his novel *The Shining*—King felt actor Shelley Duvall’s Wendy was “one of the most misogynistic characters ever put on film”—but he didn’t punish other filmmakers. Instead, King maintains a policy of granting newbie directors in need of a calling card the rights to his short stories for one dollar. In 1983 a 20-something Darabont handed King a buck to make *The Woman in the Room*, one of the few amateur short films based on his work that the author enjoyed. But Darabont’s real obsession was a prison yarn, Rita Hayworth and *Shawshank Redemption*, from *Different Seasons*, a collection of four novellas that represented King’s attempt to break out of the genre corner he’d written himself into over the years. With his ultimate goal a feature film, Darabont waited for his résumé to lengthen enough to support his aspirations before approaching King again. “In 1987, my first produced screenplay credit was *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3*,” says Darabont. “And I thought, Perhaps now is the time.”

Once Darabont received King’s blessing, he set about adapting *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*. The 96-page story is anything but cinematic, consisting largely of Red ruminating about fellow prisoner Andy, confounding Hollywood’s predilection for high-concept “*Harry Potter* meets *Die Hard*” loglines. Even King “didn’t really understand how you make a movie out of it,” says Darabont. “To me it was just dead obvious.” Still, Darabont says he “wasn’t ready” to sit down at his word processor right away, and five years passed, as he focused on paid jobs writing scripts for *The Blob* and *The Fly II*.

Darabont, who “wanted to honor the source material,” mimicked the novella’s narrative thrust in his screenplay and even lifted some dialogue verbatim. Other plot points were entirely his invention, sharpening the film’s themes and adding dashes of cinematic violence. In King’s story, a minor character, Brooks, dies uneventfully in an old folks’ home. The movie dedicates a poignant montage to the now more pivotal Brooks’s inability to make it on the outside and his subsequent heart-wrenching suicide by hanging. Tommy, a young con who can clear Andy’s name, trades his silence for a transfer to a minimum-security prison in King’s version. The script has Tommy “chewed to pieces by gunfire.” And Darabont condensed King’s several wardens into the corrupt Warden Norton, who eventually blows his brains out rather than pay Lady Justice for his sins.

Alfred Hitchcock reportedly said some version of “To make a great film you need three things: the script, the script, and the script.” Robbins says of Darabont’s finished adaptation, “It was the best script I’ve ever read. Ever.” Freeman repeated a variation of that accolade—if not *the* best script, certainly among the top.

Completed in an eight-week writing jag, Darabont’s script had the good fortune to land on the desk of a filmmaker with “a prison obsession”—longtime Castle Rock Entertainment producer Liz Glotzer. “I like reading about prison for some reason,” she says. “Any script that came in that was a prison movie, [my co-workers] would say, ‘Oh, Liz’ll read it.’ ”

Prison films date back to Hollywood’s earliest days, and the genre includes such landmarks as *The Big House, Cool Hand Luke, Papillon, Escape from Alcatraz*, and *Bad Boys*. But prison films have never been on the list of reliable moneymakers, which made Glotzer’s threat to quit if Castle Rock didn’t make *Shawshank* all the more nervy, but her passion had been stirred by her emotional response to Darabont’s script, becoming so engrossed in it she “didn’t want to finish reading.” Echoing Robbins and Freeman, she says, “It was the best script I’d ever read when I read it.”

Luckily for her, director Rob Reiner—a founder and “godfather of the company,” according to Darabont—“flipped” for the script. Reiner then made the screenwriter an offer almost no one would refuse: a rumored $3 million to direct *Shawshank* himself.

The figure was “something like that,” says Darabont, before pausing to “set the record straight . . . I’ve read so much speculation through the years, and now with the Internet every asshole who doesn’t know crap knows everything. I’ve heard versions of this where there was some power struggle over the script and the truth is incredibly simple.”

Reiner had himself mined *Different Seasons* and struck a vein when he turned the novella *The Body* into 1986’s Oscar-nominated *Stand by Me*. By the 90s, Castle Rock—formed after Stand by Me’s success and named for the movie’s fictional town—had a string of hit one-sheets on its office walls, from *When Harry Met Sally*, to another Reiner adaptation of yet another King story, *Misery*. Coming off the success of 1992’s *A Few Good Men,* Reiner saw that film’s star, Tom Cruise, as *Shawshank’s* Andy Dufresne. Though Darabont was attached to direct his script, Castle Rock asked if he would consider this alternative: “A shitload of dough,” according to Darabont, in exchange for allowing Reiner to make the movie with Cruise.

Darabont, who had been born in a French refugee camp for Hungarians fleeing the 1956 revolution and subsequently grew up poor in L.A., was tempted. “In my struggling-writer days, I could barely meet the rent,” he says. The *Shawshank* payday, whatever its precise number, would have put Darabont at the top of a profession he’d been “trying to achieve membership in for a lot of years.” Glotzer confirms Darabont was “completely tormented” by the offer. As if to turn the screws, Castle Rock said it would finance any other movie he wanted to direct if he ceded to Reiner. Surprisingly, though Darabont was only 33, philosophical thinking won out because, he says, “you can continue to defer your dreams in exchange for money and, you know, die without ever having done the thing you set out to do.” Still, the decision to direct the film himself was “nerve-racking. People get fucked in this business all the time. Contractually, [Castle Rock] could fire me after the first meeting, say I wasn’t hacking it, and, oh, gee, we’re just going to bring in Rob Reiner.”

True to his reputation as “a mensch,” however, Reiner acted as Darabont’s mentor instead—though, according to Glotzer, one detail needled the older director: “Rob joked, ‘[*Different Seasons*] is on my desk for years. You would have thought we’d have read the next story! But we didn’t.” Says Reiner, “I find it interesting that two of the most talked-about film adaptations of Stephen King’s work [*Stand by Me* and *The Shawshank Redemption*] came from the same collection of novellas and don’t rely on classic horror or supernatural elements of storytelling. In an odd way, they unmask Stephen King as a writer of exquisitely observed characters and brilliant dialog.” (In 1998, a third novella became director Bryan Singer’s *Apt Pupil*. Blumhouse Productions, the company behind *Paranormal Activity* and *Insidious*, optioned *The Breathing Method*, the remaining novella, in 2012.)

With the director in place, casting calls went out. The narrator of King’s story is a white Irishman, hence the nickname Red. “My brain went to some of my all-time favorite actors like Gene Hackman and Robert Duvall,” says Darabont. “For one reason or another they weren’t available.” Producer Glotzer ignored the racial casting specs and suggested Morgan Freeman for the role.

Interviewing Freeman is like speaking with a favorite uncle who also happens to be God. With a melodic voice that’s calm and authoritative, Freeman has commanded aural attention since his stint in the 1970s as *The Electric Company’s* Easy Reader on PBS, where he sang, “I groove on all the words around,” in bell-bottoms. *Shawshank* was “an absolutely delightful script,” says Freeman. “So I called my agent and said, ‘It doesn’t matter which part it is—I want to be in it.’ He said, ‘Well, I think they want you to do Red.’ And I thought, Wow, I control the movie! I was flabbergasted by that.”

Offers went out to the 1990s’ usual suspects for the part of Andy Dufresne. Tom Hanks and Kevin Costner passed. And though Cruise loved the screenplay—even doing a table read with the filmmakers—he balked at taking direction from a green director. Cruise considered signing on if Reiner agreed to keep a watchful eye on the production. “And Rob said, ‘No, if you’re going to do it with [Darabont], it’s his vision,’ ” says Glotzer. “So then Tom Cruise didn’t want to do it.”

Freeman insists that he suggested Robbins, and Darabont defers to his recollection: “If Morgan says that he mentioned Tim, I’m perfectly willing to take him at his word.”

Unlike some movie stars who are shockingly diminutive, at six feet five inches, actor and director Tim Robbins holds one of the Oscars’ more obscure records: tallest winner (as supporting actor in 2003’s *Mystic River*). He cruises to our interview on a bicycle and talks passionately about hedge-funders crowding out Manhattan’s artists. Like his character Andy, Robbins’s “We the people” persona inspires an impulse to buck the status quo, even though we’re meeting in an upscale-hotel lobby in Santa Monica.

By the early 90s, Robbins had broken out of minor roles in *The Love Boat* and *Top Gun*. His ascent to stardom began when he was cast as the lunkhead pitcher “Nuke” LaLoosh in 1988’s *Bull Durham*. When he won best actor at 1992’s Cannes Film Festival for his role in *The Player* as a deliciously sleazy Hollywood studio executive, Newsweek named Robbins the “man of the moment.”

Robbins used his A-list status to insist that Darabont’s inexperience—he’d directed only one made-for-TV movie, *Buried Alive*—be counterbalanced by a seasoned cinematographer, Roger Deakins, whom Robbins had worked with the year before on the Coen brothers’ film *The Hudsucker Proxy*. (Deakins would go on to shoot the death-row drama *Dead Man Walking*, which Robbins directed.) The cast was rounded out by Bob Gunton, then primarily a stage and TV actor, as the sanctimonious Warden Norton; Clancy Brown (who had played a delinquent opposite Sean Penn in *Bad Boys*) as the sadistic Captain Hadley; and veteran character actor James Whitmore as beloved elderly convict Brooks Hatlen. James Gandolfini passed on playing Bogs, a prison rapist, for a role in *True Romance* that entailed sucker-punching Patricia Arquette. Brad Pitt, cast in the role of Tommy, dropped out after his brief but shirtless appearance in *Thelma & Louise* initiated his rise to leading man.

Filming on location is often something to be endured, and *Shawshank’s* schedule was particularly brutal: workdays were 15 to 18 hours, six days a week, over three humid months inside the former Ohio State Reformatory, in Mansfield, and on nearby constructed sets, which included the huge cellblock. “We were lucky to have Sundays off,” says Darabont.

A bakery in Mansfield now sells Bundt-cake replicas of the Gothic prison, which these days is a tourist attraction that draws *Shawshank* pilgrims. But in 1993 the defunct penitentiary—closed three years earlier for inhumane living conditions—“was a very bleak place,” according to Darabont. Robbins adds, “You could feel the pain. It was the pain of thousands of people.” The production employed former inmates who shared personal stories similar to those in *Shawshank’s* script, “in terms of the violence of the guards and throwing people off the top of cellblocks,” says Deakins.



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Robbins remembers “going to that place inside for three months. It was never depressing, because Andy had this hope inside. But it was, at times, dark because of the situations that the character goes through.” Deakins confirms that working on the film was “a very intense situation. Sometimes the performances really affected me while I was shooting it.” The scene that gave Deakins “a tingle down the spine” is also Robbins’s favorite: the prisoners drinking beer on the sunny license-plate-factory roof. Coming more than a half an hour into the movie—and two years into Andy’s sentence—it’s the first bright spot in a film heretofore gray in palette and tone. Andy risks being thrown off the roof by Captain Hadley in order to procure a few “suds” for his fellow prisoners—a moment when the character shifts from victim to burgeoning legend. That Andy himself doesn’t drink is beside the point.

The scene was shot over a “hard, hard day,” says Freeman. “We were actually tarring that roof. And tar doesn’t stay hot and viscous long. It tends to dry and harden, so you’re really working. For the different setups you had to keep doing it over and over and over and over and over.”

Darabont recalls the scene as a complicated “technical thing,” because he had to match a camera move very precisely to some narration that Freeman had pre-recorded, requiring take after take. “Then I remember we got a nice take. I turned around, and somebody behind me had tears rolling down their face, and I thought, O.K., good, that one worked.’ ” By the end of the sequence “we were exhausted,” says Freeman. When the cast finally got to “sit down and drink that beer, it was very welcome.”

Robbins merely flashes his famously inscrutable smile when asked about tensions on the set of *Shawshank*, though he does allow that any “difficult times . . . had to do with the length of the days.” Freeman, like his character, Red, has no problem rounding out the narrative. “Most of the time, the tension was between the cast and director. I remember having a bad moment with the director, had a few of those,” says Freeman. Most “bad moments” stemmed from Darabont’s asking for repeated takes. “The answer [I’d give him] was no,” says Freeman. “I don’t want to be chewing the scenery. Acting itself isn’t difficult. But having to do something again and again for no discernible reason tends to be a bit debilitating to the energy.” Freeman recalls a scene where the guards re-trace Andy’s escape route, retching when they discover themselves sitting in raw sewage. “My character was listening and laughing, just howling with laughter. I had to shoot that too many times.”

Darabont puts a diplomatic spin on his feature-film debut: “I learned a lot. A director really needs to have an internal barometer to measure what any given actor needs.”

Darabont likens the stress of principal photography to “being beaten with sticks” as the constant artistic compromise makes “every day of filming feel like a failure.” But in the editing room “you start to forget all those self-torturing thoughts.” The first edit of a film that ran nearly two and a half hours in its trimmest form was “long,” says Glotzer. Among the scenes eventually left on the cutting-room floor was one of Red adjusting unevenly to his release during the Summer of Love, when, as his voiceover proclaims, there’s “not a brassiere to be seen.” One scene the producer insisted on keeping was her idea in the first place: Red and Andy’s post-prison reunion on a beach in Zihuatanejo, Mexico. Darabont’s original story ended like King’s—ambiguously—with Red on a bus hoping to get to Mexico. Darabont thought Glotzer’s ending was the “commercial, sappy version,” she says. Yet Glotzer was “adamant. If what you intend is that they’re going to get together, why not give the audience the pleasure of seeing them?”

A leisurely paced prison film with literary inflection didn’t exactly scream blockbuster. Yet *Shawshank* tested through the roof, according to Glotzer. “I mean, they were the best screenings ever.” Critics were mostly in agreement. Gene Siskel named it “one of the year’s best films” and compared it to *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, though the long-serving Los Angeles critic Kenneth Turan captured a persistent minority objection to the movie’s “sentimentality,” likening the picture to “a big glob of cotton candy.”

When the movie opened on September 23, 1994, expectations were high. Hollywood tradition dictates filmmakers drive from theater to theater on opening night, ostensibly to stand in the back of packed houses to witness audiences laughing and crying at all the carefully constructed moments. Glotzer recalls that she and Darabont “went to the Cinerama Dome, which was the coolest theater,” where the film was playing. Located on Sunset Boulevard, the 1960s-built movie house has more than 900 seats, but “no one was there”—which Glotzer blames on the “bad *L.A. Times* review.” The desperate filmmakers cornered two girls outside and “actually sold tickets” on the premise that if the pair didn’t like *Shawshank* they could call Castle Rock on Monday for a refund. “That was our big opening night,” Glotzer says dryly.

Freeman blames the title for the film’s initial flameout. “Nobody could say, ‘*Shawshank Redemption*.’ What sells anything is word of mouth. Now, your friends say, ‘Ah, man, I saw this movie, The . . . what was it? *Shank, Sham, Shim?* Something like that. Anyways, terrific.’ Well, that doesn’t sell you.”

Even if moviegoers could remember the title, 1994 was the year of two other films on opposite sides of the naughty-nice spectrum: *Pulp Fiction* and *Forrest Gump.* Both films became instant cultural phenomena—quoted, parodied, and ultimately devouring box-office receipts worldwide, while “*The Shimshunk Reduction*,” as Freeman started calling it, continued to play to mostly empty houses.

But in early 1995, *Shawshank* got its first shot at redemption when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences nominated the film in seven categories, including best picture, best actor (Freeman), and best adapted screenplay. An awards-season re-release added a bit more money to the coffers. The film was snubbed on Oscar night, a big evening for Forrest Gump, but the award buzz gave *Shawshank* a second life when it was released on VHS shortly after the Oscars. It would become the top-renting title that year. That turn of events “surprised me most,” says Deakins. “Go figure.”

In the early 90s, the cable-television pioneer Ted Turner was hungry for “quality entertainment product,” as he once put it, to feed his new TNT network. He already owned MGM’s pre-1948 film library. Yet Turner couldn’t rely on dated talkies to bring in new audiences, so in 1993 he bought Castle Rock to expand his repertory. With production and distribution now under one roof, TNT was able to leapfrog the networks—which normally got first dibs on broadcast rights to new movies—and acquired the rights to *Shawshank*, Turner in essence selling the film to himself.

Memories are faulty 20 years on, especially when it comes to recalling precise figures, and the box containing the financial records for *Shawshank* has gone missing on a studio lot. Many accounts have suggested that Turner sold himself the rights for “much lower than normal for such a big film,” as the *Shawshank* trivia page on IMDb puts it. Darabont remembers it this way: “Turner, bless his heart, part of his deal for those movies that got funded during his ownership [of Castle Rock] was that he got to air them as much as he wanted.” A more likely scenario, in Glotzer’s view, starts with the cost of a film’s licensing fee generally being based on its box-office receipts; *Shawshank’s* dismal $28 million gross would have translated into a bargain basement fee while TNT could still charge a premium for commercial time. However the economic stars aligned, TNT first aired the movie in June 1997 to top basic-cable ratings, and then began showing it over and over . . . and over. “Yeah, someone said, ‘On any given day, turn on the TV and see *The Shawshank Redemption*,’ ” says Freeman.

And it was through television that the real alchemy between *Shawshank* and its audience began. The film’s popularity “wasn’t a weed growing,” says Freeman. “It was kind of an oak tree or something—you know, slow growth.”

A chick flick *The Shawshank Redemption* is not. There are only two actresses in the film—not counting screen-siren posters of Rita Hayworth, Marilyn Monroe, and Raquel Welch—speaking 23 words of dialogue (eight of which are repetitions of “Oh God” in a sex scene). Rather, *Shawshank* falls under the rubric of “guy cry” movies. Though Deakins’s nuanced cinematography is lost on the small screen, watching *Shawshank* on TV allows a man to shed a few cathartic tears—usually during the montage where Brooks hangs himself—while ensconced on his Barcalounger in the privacy of his home. (A typical Tweet on the subject comes from @chrisk69: “A man is allowed to cry like a little girl once a year, and as *Shawshank* Redemption is on the TV tonight my time has come. #Brooks­was­here.”) Many home viewers embraced the film’s sentiment and emotion—qualities some critics took *Shawshank* to the woodshed for—and were moved by the film’s theme of undying hope as expressed through Red and Andy’s undying bond.

At heart, the film is that rare beast: a relationship movie for men. As Robbins puts it, “Here was a movie about the friendship of two men without a car chase in it.” Freeman goes one step further, saying, “To me it was a love affair. It was two men who really loved each other.” Andy and Red’s on-screen relationship, nurtured over decades, mirrors the intimate connection viewers gradually built with the film over the same time frame. Eventually coming upon *Shawshank* while flipping channels had a hypnotic effect for many: there was Freeman’s omnipresent honeypot voice luring audiences to entertainment comfort food like a siren. Steven Spielberg has called it his “chewing-gum movie,” says Darabont. “In other words, you’ve stepped in it and can’t get it off your foot. You have to watch the rest of the movie.” Perhaps this is because, as Anthony Lane wrote in an October 1994 *New Yorker* Film File, despite “moments of hokey togetherness, and way too much voice-over . . . the picture stays on track and leaves you, appropriately enough, with a surging sense of release.”

*It’s a Wonderful Life* and *The Wizard of Oz*—the most viewed film of all time, according to the Library of Congress—followed similarly erratic paths into America’s psyche. Both were box-office disappointments that were defibrillated by TV reruns. And like *The Wizard of Oz’s* “There’s no place like home,” *Shawshank* quotes are now part of the beloved-dialogue lexicon. “It’s always, ‘Get busy living or get busy dying,’ ” says Freeman. “That must be the one that resonates the most. You know, are you going to do something about your life or not?” That mantra alone has inspired everything from T-shirts and tattoos to pop songs and sermons.



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The dénouement of *The Shawshank Redemption* sees Andy crawling through what Red’s narration describes as a “river of shit”—the jail’s plumbing pipe—after 20 years of maniacally chipping away at his cement cell wall with a tiny hammer. When the sewer spills Andy out into a creek, he rips his shirt off, raises his hands to the falling rain, and revels in his glorious moment of freedom. And, yes, lightning strikes for good measure. It’s that kind of movie. How Chen Guangcheng celebrated his arrival at the American Embassy in Beijing is unknown. Reuters did report the fate of He Peirong, a woman who assisted Chen in his escape: officers took her for questioning to a hotel room where *The Shawshank Redemption* just happened to be showing on TV. And as improbable as it sounds, detainee and police “sat together on the bed to watch” the film.

Variety called *Shawshank* “a rough diamond” when it opened, and so the film responded to pressure (repeated viewings) and time (two decades) to ultimately become, if not a cinematic jewel, a global Rorschach test. “I believe part of the reason the movie is so important to people is . . . that in a way it works as a whole for whatever your life is,” says Robbins. “That no matter what your prison is—whether it’s a job that you hate, a bad relationship that you’re slogging through, whether your warden is a terrible boss or a wife or a husband—it holds out the possibility that there is freedom inside you. And that, at some point in life, there is a warm spot on a beach and that we can all get there. But sometimes it takes a while.”

*IMDb’s blue-ribbon panel consists of registered, movie-loving voters, and the site even provides a math equation—Weighted Rating = (v + (v+m)) × R + (m ÷ (v+m)) × C—for how the rankings are determined. (IMDb gives some votes more “weight” to eliminate “vote stuffing.” To protect the integrity of its list against math-whiz saboteurs, IMDb does not “disclose the exact methods used” to determine that weight.*

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the shawshank redemption

morgan freeman

TIM ROBBINS

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[@sulli130](https://twitter.com/#%21/sulli130) I watched this in high school psychology and loved it.

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[@ranwalker](https://twitter.com/#%21/ranwalker) great article about a great film :-)

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[@Spooferman\_](https://twitter.com/#%21/Spooferman_) reminded me of Andaaz Apna Apna

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zekebrick 8 hours ago

I'm not an optimistic or hopeful kind of guy but back in the mid-90s, this movie really made me think about the courage to be hopeful. I had just started dating a girl I really liked, and was so afraid it wouldn't work out. I distinctly remember thinking about Red talking about hope. I was afraid to hope for the best, but I summoned the courage to hope that the relationship with that girl worked out.

We've been married 17 years and have two great kids.

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[@aaroncoleman0](https://twitter.com/#%21/aaroncoleman0) Me too! Did we see it together at the $1 theater in CR?

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[@jkottke](https://twitter.com/#%21/jkottke) I remember the first time was on a date. Not really a date movie... but we both enjoyed it. Might have seen it again for $1, too.

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[@Lee\_Ars](https://twitter.com/#%21/Lee_Ars) Thanks for tweeting this, I'm still ready but enjoying every second. Love me some [#ShawshankRedemption](https://twitter.com/#%21/search/realtime/%23ShawshankRedemption) so much!

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[@CEMB\_forum](https://twitter.com/#%21/CEMB_forum) Stop it. I already feel old enough.

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[@jkolez](https://twitter.com/#%21/jkolez) Good read! Hipstertalk: i was in love with that movie from the moment i saw the trailer.

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[@ShivAroor](https://twitter.com/#%21/ShivAroor) like the movie i washooked to the article .

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[@GoIntoTheStory](https://twitter.com/#%21/GoIntoTheStory) [@VanityFair](https://twitter.com/#%21/VanityFair) Best storyline ever, was so entranced with the story, could not even tell they were acting, amazing actors.Thanx

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Jelinas 1 day ago

What a fantastic piece. I'm reading this after midnight in the Czech Republic, and I positively devoured it. The story could be made into a film itself.

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JohnWoods 1 day ago

Here's why I think this movie is so well liked today: It is a great story. So often the movies that take on a life of their own are those that are great stories. Too many so-called hits are just violence-filled special-effects monstrosities. The novella on which this was based was good, and the movie was even better. Scene after scene moves you. Think about Red's final appearance before the parole board. Or the opera scene. Or the scene where the warden finally discovers what's behind the poster is Andy's cell. Or Andys's visit to the bank. Or Red finding the rock with the box under it. The movies that people continue to like or even love are all great stories.

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serenatac 22 hours ago

@JohnWoods I agree. The movie works because it is a compelling story acted effortlessly by some amazing actors.

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[@chrisjrosen](https://twitter.com/#%21/chrisjrosen) thanks for the shout-out!

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[@chrisjrosen](https://twitter.com/#%21/chrisjrosen) [@vfhollywood](https://twitter.com/#%21/vfhollywood) - wow. I feel old. 20 years!

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CuteBaldChick 1 day ago

One of my favorite all-time movies. Clancy Brown who is one of the nicest guys ever, plays a loathsome, unforgettable bad guy. He is one of the best character actors around.

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[@beth4158](https://twitter.com/#%21/beth4158) that movie is one of my favorites

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[@u2girl1966](https://twitter.com/#%21/u2girl1966) Mmm hmm!

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cyndy1702 1 day ago

I have seen this movie probably over 10 times.  When I am channel surfing and come across it, I always watch it - no matter how much of the movie is left to be shown.  As far as the ending, I can't even imagine the movie without showing Andy and Red hugging on the beach.  Great, great movie.

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[@ShivAroor](https://twitter.com/#%21/ShivAroor) totally worth it!!!

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undefined 1 day ago

I visit the filming locations of this great movie every year, and they have an annual celebration featuring many of the actors. I would LOVE to see Mr. Freeman, Mr. Robbins, and Mr. Darabont at one of them! Here's the trail page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Shawshank-Trail/401002683205>

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[@ShivAroor](https://twitter.com/#%21/ShivAroor) have you read the Stephen King story from which the movie was made?Awesome.

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FrancisPlaza 2 days ago

I love this movie Tim Robbins an you Morgan Friedman was the perfect couple and  the most great and extraordinary performance, unforgettable and poignant.Congratulations I am from Venezuela and my name is Francia Gonzalez.

I Watch this movie 4 time!!!

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[@saraschneider](https://twitter.com/#%21/saraschneider) yes, am bookmarking it now, thanks!

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matt\_pressman 2 days ago

Great piece! Freeman makes an interesting point about the title. I wonder if another reason for the weak box office is that it's not really a date movie, not a family movie, and not for teenagers (the demographics that usually fill seats on an opening weekend).

It's true the ending is hokey. They could have ended it with Red on the bus and still had it be upbeat. But good call to leave out the line about "not a brassiere to be seen."

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