

## Criminal Movies. Criminal Records

I'm a criminal. There. I've said it. In fact, I may even be a terrorist. Perhaps that has you intrigued? Does it make you eager to read on? Are you wondering whether I feel remorse? How about whether I can justify my actions? Or would you like me to, for God's sake, just stop asking these annoying and presumptuous questions, and tell us how many people you've killed, already? I haven't killed anyone. Sorry. I haven't injured anyone either. Not even a paper-cut. In this broadband-enabled age, though, terrorism doesn't have to be nearly as hands-on an occupation as it used to be. Thankfully. Because as well as being someone who sits on his increasingly fat arse typing all day, and consequently wouldn't graduate from even the Cornish Liberation Army's boot camp, I'm actually a bit of a pacifist. Yep, I abhor violence. Except, perhaps, against Michael Flatley. There are always acceptable exceptions. And Celine Dion. She really should be stopped before it's too late. But besides them, yep, I'm pacifist. Sorry to let you down.

Still, pacifist or not, I am a terrorist. Quite definitely.

No, really. There's no getting around the fact. I've even committed a terrorist act - Hollywood says so: I downloaded a movie. For free. Just the once; but piracy funds terrorism, remember? I'm the terrorist equivalent of a passive smoker.

Bit of an anticlimax that, wasn't it? But if you're a regular visitor of the multiplex you're probably used to them. Piracy funds terrorism. Hollywood funds mediocrity. Not morally equivalent, but as statements, equally true?

I don't know, but I'd be more inclined to argue with the first one. And argue I shall.

ME: Oi, statement! You're not true.

STATEMENT: Oh yeah?

ME: Well you're not. Not entirely.

STATEMENT: I am! (PAUSE) Are you starting?

Well, that's not getting us very far, and as a pacifist, no, I'm not starting. So let's try another approach: anecdotal evidence. But first a quick critique of the above scene: At first the plot seems slight, but the statement's unnecessary aggression is the key point. The statement is pure overreaction. Still, the dialogue's a bit lame.

Now, on with the anecdotal evidence.

For the time being, let's switch tracks to music piracy and the days of home taping: back in the 80's and early 90's it was killing music, apparently. Not that that seemed very difficult to believe in an era that contained solo records by Phil Collins. Or entirely unwelcome.

It must have been about 1989 or 1990 that I discovered the music section of the library near my secondary school. It was a revelation: suddenly a world of possibilities was right in front of me. Well, musical possibilities; but better a world of musical possibilities than a single oyster, which seems to be the usual alternative. I gathered up as many likely looking cassettes as my meagre pocket money would stretch to, and was soon at home, happily lost in music.

New music. Sounds I hadn't heard before, and would want to hear again. And again. And again. Certainly more often than a month's loan would allow. But how? Thankfully, I had a new ghetto-blaster (as we embarrassingly called the things), with two cassette decks and high-speed dubbing. And a pile of TDK-90s: some blank, some containing music I'd recorded off the radio and no longer wanted. If I wasn't a pirate already (and I guess I was), then I certainly was by the time that month had ended. Not that I knew.

By the end of my teens, I must have had a few hundred copied albums, had probably borrowed half as many again, and I might even have copied the odd copy for someone else. I was also well aware, by that time, that my frequent copyings had not been strictly legal. But the thing was, who had they hurt?

Certainly not TDK, my favourite brand of cassettes, nor Duracell, whose products powered my walkman, nor JVC who'd made it, and the one before that. Not the artists whose albums I couldn't, anyway, have afforded to buy, and who at least got a small lending royalty from the library. Not the ones whose music I liked so much that I had to have the real thing - photos, artwork, lyrics. And definitely not the many artists who, since I have had money of my own, have benefited and will benefit from the music obsession that all that taping helped to nurture - I now have hundreds of CDs, and as for all the gigs I've attended...

Of course, things could have been a bit different.

These days, I would probably have been one of those kids sued by the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) for file-sharing. Would I have gone on to pour thousands of pounds into the music industry? No. I doubt it. And I probably wouldn't be listening to music while writing this either. And what does that say about current anti-piracy methods?

To be fair, the music industry does seem to be starting to catch on to the idea of the Long Tail. Slowly. But what of the movie industry?

The movie I downloaded was a film called Ariel, by the Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki. It's not widely available on DVD in England; at least not without paying way over the odds or learning enough Finnish to navigate cheaper stockists. Believe me, I've googled it. In fact, google it and you'll find torrent listings before you'll find an IMDb entry. (These terrorists are getting very brazen, aren't they? Not to mention clever, funding their operations through free downloads and adverts that barely cover their operating costs).

As for the film: thoroughly recommended if you like deadpan laconic gloom. In fact, I told a Finnish friend how much I liked it and now have five more Kaurismäki films - all on DVD, and all actually paid for. So wouldn't you say that my downloading actually made money for the film industry?

Perhaps, genuine piracy does fund terrorism, - I don't know, I'm not an investigative reporter - but not all piracy. In fact, free [movie downloads](#), like home-taping, might be helping keep an industry afloat. A movie download isn't necessarily a lost sale: most of the time it just lets someone see something they never would have done. And where does that lead? To a love of a certain director, a certain actor, sometimes even a writer. To future DVD purchases, future ticket sales, and, if the movie was any good, to internet buzz. Hollywood runs on hype. And what better hype-generator is there than the internet?

Actually, maybe that's what Hollywood's really worried about: if we have advance warning of its expensive turkeys, it'll have to start making better films. And about time too.

## About the Author

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