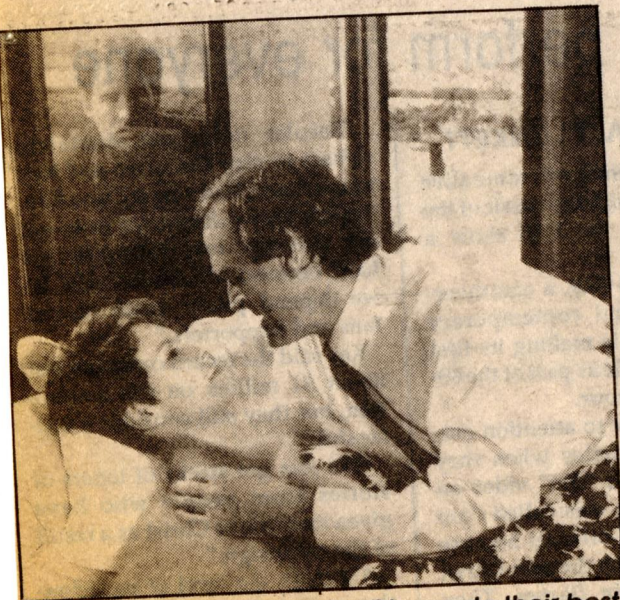




Jamie Lee Curtis and John Cleese do their best at making *A Fish Called Wanda* good for us all.

'Fish' cooks up cinematic delicacy

★ ★ ★ ★ A Fish Called Wanda
Oaks East Six

What makes *Wanda* such a refreshing change of pace is that it is delightfully, unrepentantly nasty. Not grumpy. Not ill tempered. Nasty.

Backs are stabbed, stutterers are snookered and puppies are squished all in the service of greedy, rapacious and not very nice people. This motley crew of thieves is brought together by a jewelry heist. It nets millions of pounds and the inevitable power struggle for possession of the loot.

What gives *Wanda* its zing is the bizarre cast of characters. Kevin Kline plays Otto, a dimwitted fellow who fancies himself an intellectual. Unfortunately, as Wanda notes, "Otto is so dumb, he thought the Gettysburg Address was where Lincoln lived."

Otto is smart enough to speak Italian — of a sort — to Wanda, (Jamie Lee Curtis). This drives her sexually crazy and watching Kline purr, "mozzarella, linguini, Benito Mussolini," as Cur-

tis writhes on the floor in ecstasy is one of the highlights of the film.

Despite moments of passion, Wanda is generally a marvelously self centered woman who quietly waits for her chance to seize the jewels. To do so, she sets about seducing Archie Leach (John Cleese), a barrister defending one of the thieves.

Archie suffers from the common affliction known as being British. He and Wanda are an odd coupling, but be forewarned: Archie speaks Italian *and* Russian.

The cast in this supremely funny farce is first rate. Curtis keeps us off balanced — and intrigued — with a performance that is at once wistful and ruthless. Michael Palin is equally funny as the painfully stuttering Ken. But Kline steals the show with his full bodied portrayal of Otto.

These actors — along with some swallowed fish, a cold wife and a grumpy old woman who *deserves* to die — make *A Fish Called Wanda* one of the loopyest, funniest and certainly the meanest comedies of the year.

By Michael Giltz

