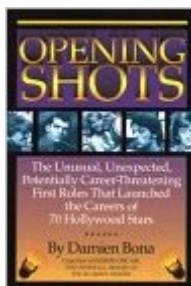


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# Opening Shots



## Synopsis

In a compulsively readable book of film lore, Damien Bona chronicles the unexpected, unusual, and inauspicious debuts of 70 stars. From Woody Allen in

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

James Dean as a boxer's corner man in a Martin-and-Lewis comedy film? Gregory Peck as a Soviet partisan fighting Nazi invaders? Sally Field as a Lolita-like teenager on a Westward bound wagon train? Kevin Costner in a soft-core "T&A" film? Michael Douglas as an antiwar activist who joins the Army? Every career has to have a beginning, and acting in films isn't any different, as readers of Damien Bona's *Opening Shots: The Unusual, Unexpected, Potentially Career-Threatening First Roles That Launched the Careers of 70 Hollywood Stars* will discover when they explore this witty, informative, and even a bit biting tome by the author of *Starring John Wayne as Genghis Khan* and *Inside Oscar: The Unofficial History of the Academy Awards*. Starting with Woody Allen's appearance in 1964's *What's New, Pussycat?* and concluding with Pia Zadora's debut in that same year's epic *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians*, Bona, a former lawyer who switched to entertainment reporting (he has contributed film-related articles to *TV Guide*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Premiere*), examines and sometimes skewers some of filmdom's greats (and not-so-greats) in their fledgling film appearances. Of course, Bona points out the good "opening shots" as well as the weird or just-plain-bad ones. Take Robert Duvall's career-starting role of Boo Radley in the 1962 classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where he plays the oft-talked about but not-seen-till-almost-the-end of

Robert Mulligan's adaptation of Harper Lee's best-selling novel. He is only onscreen for three and a half minutes (appearing 113 minutes into the film, at that!) and has no dialog, but he does save Jem and Scout from a vicious attack, revealing himself to be not a monstrous freak but just a mentally retarded man with the gentleness of a child trapped in an adult man's body. Many of the 70 entries deal with short first roles that don't add or detract from a film's positive qualities, but the more fascinating ones involve such possible career-enders as Sally Field's appearance in 1966's *The Way West* "as one Mercy McBee, a teenager whose personality is entirely defined by her sex drive." Who would have thought that this future two-time Academy Award winner (and TV's cute Gidget) made her film debut as a 19th Century Lolita of the Oregon Trail? Equally silly was Walter Matthau's villainous turn in Burt Lancaster's only directorial effort, 1955's *The Kentuckian*, a Western which starred Lancaster, Dianne Foster, Diana Lynn, and Donald McDonald, with Matthau earning fifth billing as a saloon keeper with a very cruel streak. He clashes with Lancaster for various reasons, not the least of which is the fact that they both want the attentions of the lovely Miss Lynn. Now, the idea of Matthau as a heavy is not ridiculous, since he could play cold and unendearing characters (as he did in 1964's *Fail-Safe*), but the idea of ruffled, New York City-born-and-bred Matthau as a villain in a Western is, sadly, rather ridiculous. Another surprising first film appearance, considering his later appearances in *The Big Chill*, *The Right Stuff*, and *Jurassic Park*, was Jeff Goldblum as "Freak Number 1" in that Charles Bronson vigilante vehicle, *Death Wish* (1974). There, the guy Bona characterizes as "an expert interpreter of neurotic intellectualism" has what the author describes as "one of the most unpleasant screen debuts ever, Jeff Goldblum goes through his paces robbing ...and... murdering." (I'll take Bona's word for it; I've never seen this "classic" vendetta-driven flick that started a franchise, and judging by the obscene lines written for Goldblum by screenwriter Wendell Mayes, I don't plan to!) Debra Winger, she of the sexiest voice (at least to me) in movies and star of the somewhat mawkish but enjoyable *An Officer and a Gentleman*, made her film debut in a soft-core flick called *Slumber Party '57*, in which six nymphets gather for a, you guessed it, a slumber party while their boyfriends are out of town. Winger (who omits this film from her official resume) bares her assets and acts poorly in this "sex-ploitation" film that Bona says "is definitely in the running as the worst film in this book." Fortunately, not many people saw this film, much less read the few obscure reviews in the Hollywood trade publications, and Winger went on to other roles until finally catching the audience's imagination in *Urban Cowboy*. *Opening Shots* is a light and entertaining read, and Bona mixes short star biographies, anecdotes (there is, for instance, a list of Hollywood stars who married co-stars they met on sets), and witty asides on the margins of pages. Each entry is presented in alphabetical order and introduced with a major credits box to the

"first film," a still, and a Bona-ism (Meryl Streep's for 1976's Julia reads, "Already with the accent") which sets the tone for the short chapter.

What a fun book! Every chapter is thoroughly researched and provides juicy details about each actor's screen debut. Mr. Bona engages you at every turn. He should be at your next dinner party. A must-read for movie aficionados!

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