

Nuns, flies, handmaids, what else do we need . . .

by Gurn Blasten

Nuns on the Run

A very funny caper film similar in style and plot to the recent *A Fish Called Wanda*. Essentially, a homage to the two famous British movie 'institutions,' the Ealing Studios comedies and the "Carry On" films. It's not that original but it is a lot of fun, and not nearly as lumbering as the recent American film *We're No Angels*, which explored the same humorous terrain. A must for Monty Python fans!

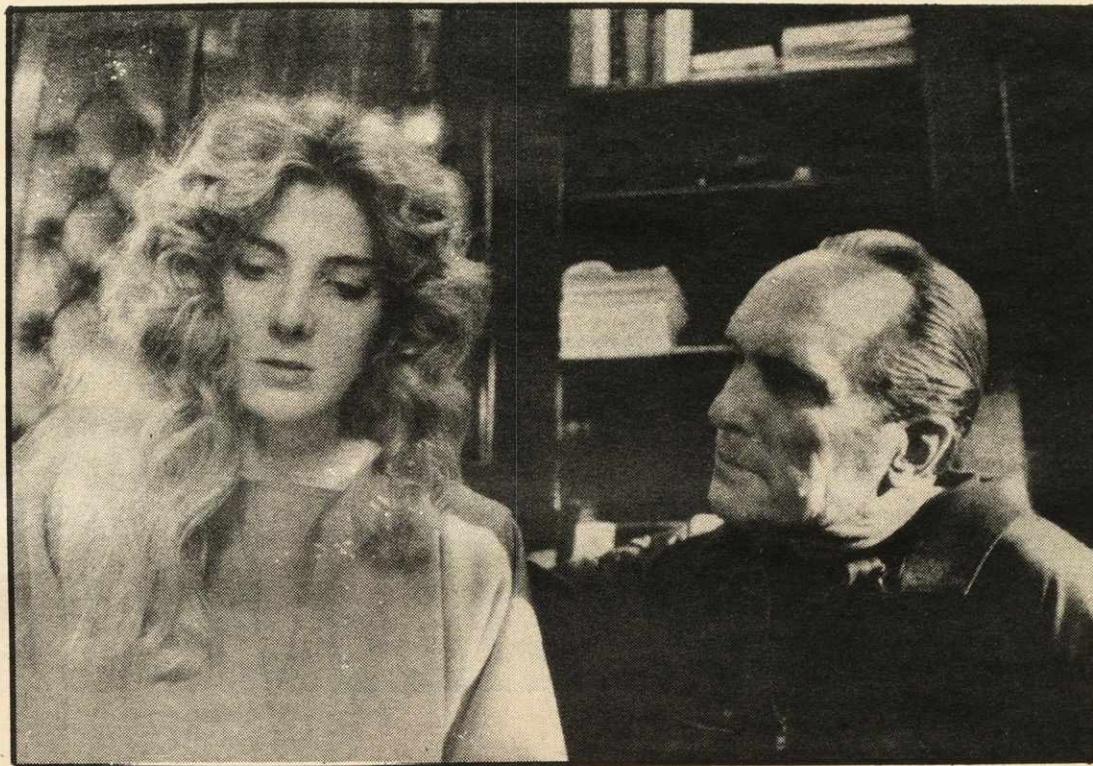
Lord of the Flies

A technically competent yet needless colour version of the William Golding novel. It cannot approach the artistry of the 1963 black and white Peter Brook version. The story this time is strangely uninvolved due mainly to the unnecessary changes made to the story by the filmmakers. This time the boys are contemporary American cadets and this new approach totally sabotages the shocking developments of their characters. The United States is such a pugilistic and violent

society that the transformation of the boys into savages loses all its interest and shock value. Without that aspect the rest of the film's message falls apart and one is only left to cringe at the gory deaths with little or no sympathy for the characters involved.

The Handmaid's Tale

This is a very strange and disturbing film. Although it is adapted from the bestselling Margaret Atwood novel, the characters have been de-emphasized in the film, in favour of creating an absolutely suffocating futuristic society. This is a women's 1984, where procreation is cold and impersonal, and only a few women are chosen to bear the population's children. Director Volker Schlöndorff (*The Tin Drum*) has created a perfect surrealistic nightmare where the enigmatic characters become figures on a frightening landscape. One is left only the experience of a cloying atmosphere of this clinical and oppressive theocracy. Is it a good adaptation of the novel? No, but it is a truly unsettling picture of a futuristic dystopia.



Natasha Richardson and Robert Duvall in a scene from *The Handmaid's Tale*



... well you have More dead flies

by Sandy Cross

Sir William Golding's novel, so popular in the 50s and 60s, has returned to the screen for a second time. *Lord of the Flies* is back, and with a few changes not really for the better. Still, Golding's harrowing account of man's basic instincts taking over retains its ability to shock those viewers who are willing to look deeper than the lush cinematography and deceptively simple story line.

The story concerns a group of young American military school cadets (in the book and first movie the boys were from a British public school) whose plane crashes in a tropical sea, wounding the pilot and forcing the youngsters onto a deserted, albeit gorgeous, island. This locale would seem to be heaven on earth for young boys, a place for endless rounds of cowboys and Indians.

Ralph, the leader of the cadets insists they work together, keeping a signal fire alight, scavenging for food and water, watching over the delirious pilot, and even holding regular assemblies.

Unfortunately, Ralph has a rival in the form of Jack, a rough

tough cynical spitfire. Thus the stage is set for a contest of wills between Ralph, the kind, practical, civilized, always optimistic leader, and Jack, the adventurous rebel who would rather 'go native,' hunt wild pigs, and take advantage of the lack of authority.

Ralph sets the boys to work doing tasks designed to better the odds of survival and rescue. However, the promise of a wild existence in the jungle eventually lures the majority over to Jack. It is ironic that what woos the boys to Jack is the promise of freedom from discipline, when in fact Jack sets himself up as an autocratic chieftain with rules that are at first harsh and that eventually become superstitious and cruel.

The situation changes from a slightly warped game to a deadly serious contest between savage and civilized man. After this the shocks come thick and fast right up to the abrupt conclusion.

The two changes made are quite important, and are not for the better. In the book and first film, the boys were upper class ultra-civilized Brits instead of American military cadets, hence

the disintegration seemed to be of society's moral fibre, not just military discipline (although, to be fair, this film hints at the former).

Secondly, very little connection is made to the *Lord of the Flies*, which, in the book, was worshipped by Jack's band as a demigod. This film only briefly marks the parallel between the rotting corpse of a pig and the destruction of civilized behaviour.

Nevertheless the film succeeds, partly because of a virtually fool-proof story and director Harry Hooks's remarkably faithful adaptation. By casting mostly unknowns, not allowing the atmosphere to become sinister before it was called for, and creating a continuously mounting tension, the director makes this film work.

This is a good re-telling of the cautionary tale, which, for better or worse, reminds us of the savagery that lurks just beneath manners.

By the way, look for famous British actor Bob Peck (*Edge of Darkness*) in a tiny role at the end, delivering one line in an American accent — deep stuff.

