

Monks and murder make medieval mess



WHAT A WAY TO GO: The eternally stone-faced Sean Connery is watched by "a fine bunch of misdirected libidos" who are the backbone of *The Name of the Rose*.

By HUMBERTO DA SILVA

There was a time when "A Major European Production" meant a cerebral parlor drama from Sweden or perhaps a French sex farce. We now have the James Bond Series, and specifically Agent 007 to thank for changing this cliché and making possible such a film as *The Name of the Rose*.

Umberto Eco's novel is related to the film in name only. A two-hour film cannot do justice to the intricacies revealed in Eco's meticulous prose or begin to tap into the wealth of arcane detail that will separate this book from the hundreds like it that will surely be written.

Director Jean-Jacques Annaud, whose last period piece was *Quest for Fire*, owes much of his depiction of medieval life to the dirty realism of Monty Python in their classics *Jabberwocky* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. While the rat-eating hunchback is a high point of the film, its vulgarity is a paltry substitute for the book's insight.

The story? Take a deep mental breath: a Franciscan monk (Sean Connery) and his young novice (Christian Slater) arrive at a Benedictine monastery in northern Italy as part of a delegation which is to debate the Dominican Order as to whether or not Christ owned his own clothes and, by extension, whether or not the church should amass wealth for the glory of God. The monks that run the place are buying the farm faster than Agribusiness Conglomerates ever could and Connery takes it upon himself to make sense of it all before the Inquisitor (F. Murray Abraham) is called in to make burnt offerings.

Then, the plot complications: a naive Christian is in love with the

inevitable young peasant girl accused of witchcraft, Abraham is Connery's *bete noire* from way back, and it seems that Aristotle's *Second Book of Poetics* is killing the clergy. How do you get all of this and some local colour into an accessible two-hour movie? With four scriptwriters and a shoehorn.

Sean Connery walks through this pedestrian and sometimes uneven script displaying none of his picaresque humour that served him well in *Robin and Marian* and *The Man Who Would Be King*. Someone somewhere forgot that this man is the quintessential James Bond and not Yoda.

The other actors fare slightly better. Christian Slater does an excellent impression of having been born yesterday. Michael Lonsdale (see: James Bond villain: *Moonraker*) makes a passable abbot, but then so would anyone with a BBC enunciation superimposed over a french inflection. Valentina Vargas, a.k.a. The Rose of the title, does a fine impersonation of a greasy, yet mud-free Mediterranean Rae-Down Chong having sex. F. Murray Abraham was hired for his Oscar, needed the money, and is forgiven.

The real stars here are the European character actors who play the peripheral monks. They are a fine bunch of misdirected libidos, and the backbone of the film. The performances delivered by this collection of immensely talented players is one of the better arguments for seeing *The Name of the Rose*. Another is that it will clean your palate for more *Miami Vice*.

Big Book, Big Bucks, Big Box Office. *The Name of the Rose* becomes simply the name of the game.

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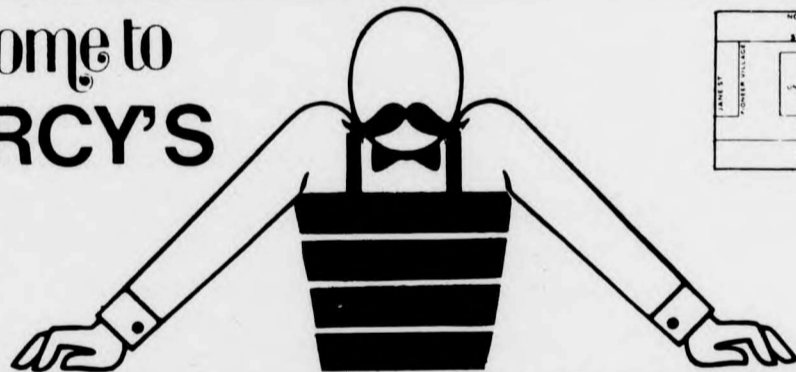
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