

Entertainment

Editor: Agnes Kruchio

More than a disaster film

Director buoys Juggernaut

By WARREN CLEMENTS

You'd think movie publicists would learn.

Here we are in the year of the disaster films, those blockbuster epics about ravaged airplanes, burning office complexes and smouldering blimps, and everyone's being bored to death.

The Poseidon Adventure, aside from its overdone Christian allegory, slogged on and on without end. Airport had scores of top-name actors doing tedious little bits. And Airport 1975 promises little relief.

By the time Hindenburg, Earthquake and The Towering Inferno get here, ushers will as a matter of course be handing out No-Doz to the audiences.

So why, when United Artists has a good film like Juggernaut on its hands, does it flog the film as just another disaster film, to the point of grievously misrepresenting the story?

The picture owes its life to director Richard Lester, whose track record includes the Beatles' films, Petulia, How I Won the War, The Knack and, lately, The Three Musketeers. His style is marked by a fine supporting cast of cocksure British characters with barely decipherable accents, who toss off uproarious comments so matter-of-factly that it's a challenge to catch them.

NO EXERCISE

Lester is about the only director who could have saved Juggernaut from becoming an uninteresting "will the characters survive or won't they?" exercise.

Juggernaut concerns an ocean liner in the mid-Atlantic, threatened by a cache of explosives.

The mastermind behind the bombs has installed a sensor so delicate that despite full knowledge of where the bombs are, the ship's personnel can't move them without risking detonation.

Enter Richard Harris, ace bomb dismantler, and his sidekick David Hemmings: and their race against time supplies the tense guts of the film.

There are certain inescapable conventions in this type of picture. Out of a boatload of 1,200 mundane people, we must have a core of 10 or so to sympathize with and worry over. So we get an American mayor, a footloose woman who falls for the captain, the wife of the British Scotland Yard agent who's searching for the extortionist who planted the bomb, the wife's two obnoxious kids, and the social convener who has to make sure everybody on the boat is happy.

At least we don't get hysterical wives, cynical news reporters, more obnoxious kids, cute stowaways or prisoners being brought to justice.

HARRIS VS. BOMB

In any case under Lester's direction, the individual characters aren't really the focal point. There is a definite protagonist (Harris) and a definite antagonist (the bombs, and indirectly the unseen extortionist who calls himself Juggernaut.)

The characters, the boat, the political intrigue behind the ransom demands, everything else in the movie plays second fiddle to their conflict: the struggle between the explosives expert, a man at the top of his profession, and the unseen villain, equally professional, who

designed the bomb.

Lester manages to keep Omar Sharif hidden away in his role as the captain, which is a blessing, since Sharif isn't a strong enough actor to handle more than a relatively minor part. And he gives the role of social convener to a great character actor, Roy Kinnear, who, as a chubby soldier, almost made it with John Lennon to the end of How I Won the War.

The one glaring inadequacy of the film is in the portrayal of the owner of the shipping firm which controls the ocean liner, and the government official who doesn't want him to pay the ransom demanded by the extortionist. Aside from having to cope with a rather silly and incredible sub-plot, neither actor gives the impression that he has been at his job longer than that particular shooting day, or that he believes in the insipid and time-consuming banter he is ex-

pected to carry on.

On the plus side, director Lester paints in the background of the ocean liner with deft shots of stewards trying to carry trays through the rocking ship, while guests politely excuse themselves from the table, presumably to return to their cabins to retch in peace.

Juggernaut is also marked by an intriguing photographic device: all the scenes on the ship are filmed by a gently rocking camera, to simulate the effect of a turbulent ocean voyage.

As a parting note, beware once again the publicity campaign for this film; David Hemmings is supposed to "feel the full fury of the Juggernaut" while Roy Kinnear "has a final chance to prove himself to himself" or some such rot. Garbled nonsense, all of it.



The great and the near-great; Premier William Davis chats with sculptor Henry Moore at the opening of the Art Gallery of Ontario last Saturday, in front of one of Moore's sculptures.

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