

MR OPINION

by Wm. (ubiquity) Sykes

Worst thing you can do for a movie: Promote it. Well, that's assuming you've already gone and made the damned thing, easily one of the most nefarious acts perpetrated by the class of criminals known as Producers.

The process works like this: Somebody, somewhere, has an idea (if he's a real twerp, he'll call it a concept or even a 'vision'), then he trots it round the beg men looking for enough money for any twelve sane people to retire comfortably at the age of 29, then translates the thing into a Project which may or may not someday yield a Product. If it does, then the Product is subjected to a campaign of promotion.

At some point in this sequence, it is entirely possible, though not absolutely necessary, that some other people have written, filmed and edited a movie, replete with actors and props and, these days, a variety of effects.

But it's the promotion that has become perhaps the dominant factor in the film industry. Nobody seems willing to rely on the substance of a thing; it must be dressed up with tangential promises and expectations, atmosphere and impressions often quite unconnected with the real movie.

And all of this is in aid of persuading people, even coercing them, into paying an admission price. And at that point the flaw in the weave catches up and we get mired in the fallacy of the adverts.

Frustration sets in. At best, one will heave a wry chuckle and forget all about it; at worst, such malignant seething rage will boil up in your intestines that you'd like nothing so much as to clasp your spasming fingers round the padded necks of the corpulent committeemen who've engineered this fraud.

There's a subspecies of this advertising gambit wherein the interfering oafs muck about in the actual production process before the movie's even finished. On the basis of eventual marketing strategy, they'll force decisions on such matters as script, casting, choice of location, and so on. When this happens, we wind up with a movie suffering from cross purposes; it's neither one thing nor the other. For the sake of having something loudly to promote, the movie is invaded by disparate elements which, ultimately, serve only to detract from whatever the writer or director had hoped to achieve.

So I went to the cinema a few weeks back to see something called *The Big Blue*, from the French director Luc Besson, who achieved some prior notoriety with an odd thing called *Subway*. This movie was the dubious beneficiary of a mass market promotion campaign featuring, among other things, a bunch of television spots which seemed to be reaching for the kind of dramatic mystical flavour which worked for *Cocoon* and a few other films but which is wildly inappropriate in this instance. But that's only part of the problem.

The Big Blue is a very simple story, almost entirely European in flavour and setting (Mediterranean), dealing with the lives of two chaps who, from childhood on a small Greek island, come to be primarily occupied with diving, as a sport, as a living and pastime, as a way of just being in an understanding of the world. The story concerns the interaction of these two guys, first as children, then, more competitively, as adults as they get into the illegal but fairly enthusiastically pursued sport of free-diving (a contest of swimming as deep as possible without an air supply). And that's the premise.

But the bum boys in the front office decided that such a movie hadn't a hope of pulling down any respectable share of American coin, even if it was filmed in English with pretty high production values. So what they did was arrange for a whole new story element to be grafted on, like a third leg growing out of your stomach, so the North American film-going public could have a recognizable hook upon which to snare their plump cheeks.

Enter a name known to some extent in N.A., Rosanna Arquette, to play the part of a young American woman with whom one of our lads, played by French actor Jean-Marc Barr, may enjoy the anguish of a romantic bond. This gimmick yields us a perfectly silly and much over-emphasized subplot which is so completely unnecessary that it significantly ruins what would otherwise be a damned pleasant little movie. Aside from being relatively easy to look at, Arquette doesn't do much of anything but cavort inanely, embarrassing herself and me along the way, and she gets top billing in the credits.

If the time wasted establishing the female character had been spent in further development of the primary characters, then the easy humour and charm of the story might have flowed more naturally and the eventual conflict and resolution might not have been skewered to the point of ridicule.

The Big Blue enjoyed a two-week run in the local cinemas (one of which was matinees only), but when it turns up on Pay-TV or cassette, you may find some pleasure in it if you keep in mind that a good chunk of the movie really doesn't belong. There's still something worthwhile about the rest of it.

On another front, late August saw the debut of a new locally-produced, bi-monthly magazine called *Wild East*, which is a welcome development. It intends to be a maritime-oriented arts periodical focusing on the less popular and conventional paths of artistic endeavour. This first issue, although a little rough-hewn, shapes up as generally promising. The one awkward point about it is that the editorial staff have chosen to proclaim a political role, somewhere to the left, but they seem to be announcing themselves with the kind of rigid fervour which I rather expect from the reactionary, not to say fascist, end of the conservative spectrum. It may be that a left wing view is a bit more often reasonable, but I've been noticing through the years that any political stance at all is a dangerous thing. Perhaps *Wild East* will not impale itself upon some messy ideological promontory, perhaps they'll calm down a bit.

buena suerte,
Bill



VIDEO X

Eric Hill looks at some things you might want to pick up with the twinkles and pop.

How I spent my summer:

Well after I'd finished painting and/or mowing everything in sight, I'd either drink myself unconscious (the Canadian working ethic), or rent a few movies and view the modern state of cinema (and only have a few beers and some popcorn).

Now most people rent movies like *Platoon* or *Fatal Attraction*; I don't for two reasons: 1. I'd like to think I'm a non-conformist, and 2. You can't find any bloody copies of these anyway. The alternative is to rent less commercial pictures, and you might even find a few gems amongst the celluloid swill.

From the producers of *The Hitcher* comes a stylish vampire film set, not in Transylvania, but in the Southern U.S., called *Near Dark*. It tells the story of a group of blood-suckers touring the states in blackened out Winnebegos, campers or any other vehicles they can "borrow." The action begins with the hero picking up a pretty, young female vampire named May. She takes a liking to him and rather than draining him she "turns" him. The rest of the film deals with Caleb's (the hero) ethical struggle of killing to live. You'll recognize several actors from *Aliens* in the stylish, and sensuous film.

If you're into murder mysteries with new wave/punk soundtracks, then *Slamdance* is for you. It stars Tom Hulce (*Animal House*, *Amadeus*) as a cartoonist C. C. Dood, who gets drawn into an extra-marital affair with a gorgeous blonde (Virginia Madsen) which ends up being more trouble than he'd bargained for: she's killed and his problems begin from all sides. Also starring are musicians-turned-actors John Doe and Adam Ant, as well as the great Harry Dean Stanton (*Alien*, *Repo Man*).

Finally, if you like a little history in your entertainment, *Gothic* is the movie for you. It tells the tale of the strange evening which inspired Mary

Shelley to write *Frankenstein*. If you think Friday night at the Cosmo is an intense time, you should see what a fun night is for Mary, Percy Bysshe and Lord Byron. Directed by Ken Russell (*Altered States*) and with soundtrack by Thomas Dolby, this movie is visually impressive as well as suspenseful and erotic (these people shared a lot of things besides ideas).

So next time you go to your video store and all the copies of *Good Morning Vietnam* are out, don't rip the clerk's eyelids off, experiment with less obvious titles. Just avoid films with Italian producers or starring Michael Caine (even though he's starred in half the movies there are).

ERIC HILL

And finally, gosh my head's all aswim with the latest revolution in TV channel selection in the area. I wonder though; maybe it'll take a few years for some of the bugs to be worked-out, like the Gleaner publishing a program schedule that in some way reflects what is actually being broadcast - whaddya figure?

Bill

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