Lamont Johnson's Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone

Spacehunter (short for) is such a dispiriting experience that it forced me into happier memories of (generally) more enjoyable cinematic times. The outdoor locations, conjuring up some other planet in future years, looked in their wilderness grandeur much like Monument Valley. Aria. Probably they were but it took John Ford's eye for composition to make it so scenically special. Here, rather like the movie, it is just flat with occasional eruptions. Nature made the Valley the way it was; assorted Canadians and Americans have made this movie mostly monotonous exposition and, climactically, violent and confusing action.

Another pleasant recollection was that 3-D used to be fun. Be assured that there have been stereoscopic films— even whole features, with stories, around a quite a long time. Columbia's ad campaign for Spacehunter calls it the first 3-D film backed by a major studio. They must mean the first so coveniently.

The project escalated and I joined them in the absurd hope that it forced me into an honest try. TV movie-style. But alas, the wit ran dry, the nasties once introduced proved dreary and the single) big indoor set was dark and grungy in the extreme.

An outsider cannot speculate on whether Jean LaFuerre, who was to have directed from his own co-written story, could have done so adequately, once the stuntmen project escalated and 3-D filming was imposed, almost at the last minute. LaFuerre, in print, has been very reasonable and not publicly resentful of either Columbia or the chosen replacement, journeyman Lamont Johnson. One hopes he will live to fight another day. Closing the book on that, then, it can be pointed out that nobody does anything on Spacehunter more than his ambition— if not its ambition— remains modest indeed.

Olentine Denton

Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone (in 3-D)


If All In Good Taste is to be considered at all—a proposition open to serious doubt—then we may as well consider from the critical perspective that offers the most opportunity for both elucidation and appreciation. One of the purposes that can only be the perspective of anti-art.

As J. Hoberman laid down the criteria, anti-art (see Film Comment vol. 16, no. 41) is the only form that turns out to be such a critical and financial success that the filmmaker agrees to make more films, following which, "attacks the reproduction of itself, the institutional mode of reproduction, but it's failure to do so deforms the simplest forms for the society, so as to force you barely recognize them." Objectively bad films include works by Edward D. Wood, Jr. and Oscar Micheaux, works that religiously deny ed. A film's attempt to create, that deconstruct themselves before your very eyes and leave nothing but the grinding, ceaseless awareness of botched artifice.

All In Good Taste more than amply fills the bill. Actors gaze serenely off-camera and react to their own perceptions with poise beyond the merely wooden. Something intended as a running gag lumbers on screen, sets up its promises, then discards them temporarily. The whole is portrayed by two wily different locations— one of them a town-house. The same reaction shot gets cut out in between before a few crumbs occur. The film is deprived of such pros as Harvey Atkin and Glen Or Glenda. It misses on three counts: it's not its ambition— then it ought to be given its due. Good Taste.

Even so, All In Good Taste is far from being an anti-matter piece of the order of Glen Or Glenda. It misses on three counts. Good Taste has even less of it. Kramreither would have been deprived of such pros as Harvey Atkin and Glen Or Glenda. It misses on three counts: it's not its ambition— then it ought to be given its due. Good Taste.

Anthony Kramreither's All In Good Taste


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