

FILM REVIEWS

Peter Carter's

Rituals

i: Peter Carter, **sc:** Ian Sutherland, **ph:** René Verzier, **ed:** George Appleby, **sd:** Douglas Canton, **m:** Hagood Hardy, **l.p.:** Hal Holbrook (Harry), Lawrence Dane (Mitti), Robin Gammell (Martin), Ken James (Abel), Gary Reineke (D.J.), **exec. p.:** Harold Greenberg and Robert A. Kantor, **p:** Lawrence Dane, **p.c.:** Astral Bellevue Pathé Limited and Canart Films Limited, 1976, **col:** 35 mm, **dist:** Astral Films, **running time:** 100 min.

A few years ago, Mayor Jean Drapeau decided to push through a bylaw banning newspaper vending machines from the sidewalks as part of his continuing program to make Montreal celestial. He felt they were an eyesore. Considering the decrepit state of much of the city, the local television news people found the whole thing screamingly funny and put together a little five minute item *à la* Drapeau. The film consisted of shot panning past scrap yards, garbage dumps and smoke stacks, accompanied by sweet flowery music intercut with short shots zooming into the offending newspaper machines with loud jarring discords on the soundtrack. **Rituals** has about the same cinematic subtlety. The only way you know it is a horror movie is because of a couple of zooms, accompanied by a chord of scary music. The rest is a banal adventure story with bad acting, bad dialogue and bad music, all precariously balanced on a shaky and unoriginal plot.

Five doctors on a camping trip are flown into the middle of the wilderness. On arrival they are all bubbly and frothy in an atmosphere with the same gripping intensity of those beer commercials on television (you know the ones with Harry and the boys getting together for some weekend fishing and someone falls in the water).



The end of a hard day in **Rituals**

After about half an hour of this yuk-yuk merriment, there are a couple of zoom shots and loud chords and the doctors start getting chopped up by a nasty in the woods. If you think zoom shots of dismembered heads on a stake is too trite, think again.

From the very start, **Rituals** was a risky venture. You can get away with a mediocre dramatic film but if you make a comedy, it had better be funny, and if you attempt a horror film, it had better be scary. The Saturday night audience with which I saw the film collectively gasped only twice in the hour and a half. Someone screamed, but it was in the wrong place. There are several ways you can unnerve people; my favorite is *à la* Hitchcock where the world goes slightly askew, as in a distorting mirror. People like Corman don't bother with this subtlety, and are content to keep the screen liberally splashing with gore. This film half-heartedly attempts both and, except for one or two moments near the beginning, achieves neither. Added into the pot is the last refuge of a desperate screenwriter — symbolism. The river they are travelling is

haunted with Indian legends that have "a beginning and an end and that's the middle", whatever that's supposed to mean. For the Jungians among us, there are lots of snake crosses and animal entrails flashed around the screen.

Unfortunately, no amount of cerebral icing can cover up the emptiness of the script. The film is technically competent, in parts even slick, but the sad fact is that we just don't give a damn about these guys, much less about what's happening to them. Halfway through the film we are made aware that one of the doctors is a good guy, and one is just cut to save his own skin, and we find out that somebody's father had a drinking problem. The trouble is that this introduction of human content is almost a screenwriting afterthought and it comes too little, too crudely and too late. That is really the major problem with the film; all of the thin action rests on the crudely portrayed characters. You end up not caring about the protagonists, not identifying with them and it's game over; no drama, no horror, no film.

Ronald Blumer

Film Credit Abbreviations: d. Director asst d. Assistant Director sc. Script adapt. Adaptation dial. Dialogue ph. Photography sp ph. eff. Special Photographic Effects ed. Editor sup. ed. Supervising Editor sd. sound sd. ed. Sound Editor sd. rec. Sound Recording i. des. Production Designer a. d. Art Director set dec. set Decorator m. Music m. d. Music Director cost. costumes choreo. Choreography l. p. Leading Players exc. p. Executive Producer p. Producer assoc. p. associate Producer p. sup. Production Supervisor p. man. Production Manager p. c. Production Company col. colour Process dist. Distributors narr. Narration