**Jean Lafleur's**

**Illya the Tigress**


Big-breasted rather than big-hearted, Dyanne Thorne plays the blonde huntress Illya, not as a goddess like Venus, but a fiercer and colder queen like Diana, with a sneer and a deliberate way of saying things like “Look how Sasha loves the taste of man” (referring to her pet Siberian tiger) through her teeth as though there were spaces between the words.

*Illya the Tigress* doesn’t waste time with niceties, but gets right down to providing the special kind of food the viewer paid for. Satisfaction, that’s what Illya offers. She’s been around (as the She-Wolf of the SS and in the Harem of the Oil Shiek), and her reputation’s way out in front, like her body. She delivers like a comic book; not the Classics type that mother’s buy their kids, but the real thing, full of body blows and bodies. And Thorne performs perfectly. Her clipped and ridiculous delivery keeps the film on a perfectly balanced comic-adventure plane. No one is going to take Illya or her horrible henchmen or all the many various murders more seriously than they take Dick Tracy or Spiderman or Wonder Woman.

The film works, catering to the kid in us, still scaring ourselves over trivia so we can ignore the bigger threats we cannot handle. Films like *Illya* offer us thrills and escapes in their immediacy, even when the escapes are into death (well, at least that’s over now...) while ecologists, conservationists and conscientious scientists warn us of horrors that creep creep creep and cannot be contained.

The plot is endlessly intriguing as Illya, the Siberian labor-camp commander, sternly controls the destinies of her many slaves, both willing and unwilling. Speaking in basic English, and slowly, the dialogue is almost physically balloononed over the heads of the characters as they strut and pose their way through the sequences.

From Illya we get the biggest-breasted, coldest-hearted bitch around. In fact, Thorne’s portrayal makes us like her better the more we hate her, for her coldness indicates an impoverishment we can sense, and her world doesn’t seem desirable even though she’s got all the power. Just as we’re feeling James Bond would make short work of her, we realize her total lack of feeling and tenderness would give her the final advantage. He’s still human. But Illya is a total villain, for she is absolutely and completely selfish, and a lust for power is her only weakness.

Some scenes are intentionally hilarious, offering gross relief, in keeping with the nature of the film. Illya’s lusty cohorts practically fill a fireplace with the glass they smash while on a competitive toasting to all the various hair on Illya’s body. And when Illya rides booted and spurred in flesh-toned undies bouncing with her lovers, one under, one over, the exorbitance of the quickly-cut scene, its enthusiastic playfulness and lack of reality, keep it cleaner than Disney. And about as sexy. Illya is too big-chested to be imagined in bed with a real live man — she is a goddess of the bosom, a Diana, an emasculating manizer produced from a cross between Mae West and the Snow Queen.

And *Illya the Tigress* succeeds where many a more pretentious film fails — on technicalities. The camerawork, editing, scoring, are all routinely good. Not too good, but just right to fit the film. And the performances are uniformly suitable, while many of the effects are excellent and imaginative, and some of the fights a real lesson in cutting and continuity.

Primarily, the various deaths — by fire, drowning, freezing, garroting, stabbing, impaling, falling from heights, being harpooned, axed, stabbed, shot, whipped or attacked by sword, chainsaw, or caught in a snow remover seem to offer the audience considerable variety and a pleasurable release. No emotions are involved but visceral reactions certainly are, and the more attuned the viewer is to spontaneous fight reflexes, the more that viewer will leap about in his seat. As for me, I was scarcely bothered at all, particularly as all the bad things were happening to men. In this respect, the film is a good deal easier to take than, for instance, *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, or any rape, beating, or sadistic act toward women. Men cause a lot of fighting, and seem to like it, so let them go at it. At least on film. And under Illya’s maternal eye. She’s got a motherly hug for the winners, if they’re her boys, and a kind of solicitous dismissal into death for them if they’re not.

Compared to more sophisticated material, the film is also clean and pure: no children are involved at all; no demoralizing hesitancy about what is virtuous ever appears. Instead, the good (bravery, coupled with intelligence and a remarkable degree of stubbornness) prevails, and Illya, because she has other films to make, is left alive at the end, stranded in the middle of the St. Lawrence on a rather cool night in mid-winter, when the man she has been attempting to torture and kill all through the movie, refuses to rescue her.

Natalie Edwards

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