

FILM REVIEWS

David Cronenberg's

The Parasite Murders

A film by: David Cronenberg. **Screenplay:** Cronenberg. **Cinematography:** Robert Saad. **Music:** Ivan Reitman. **Sound:** Dan Goldberg. **Editing:** Patrick Dodd. **Performers:** Paul Hampton, Joe Silver, Lynn Lowry, Alan Migicovsky, Susan Petrie, Barbara Steele and Ronald Mlodzik. **Producer:** Ivan Reitman. **Produced in 1974 by Cinepix. Colour:** 35mm. **Running time:** 87 minutes. **Distribution in Canada:** Cinepix.

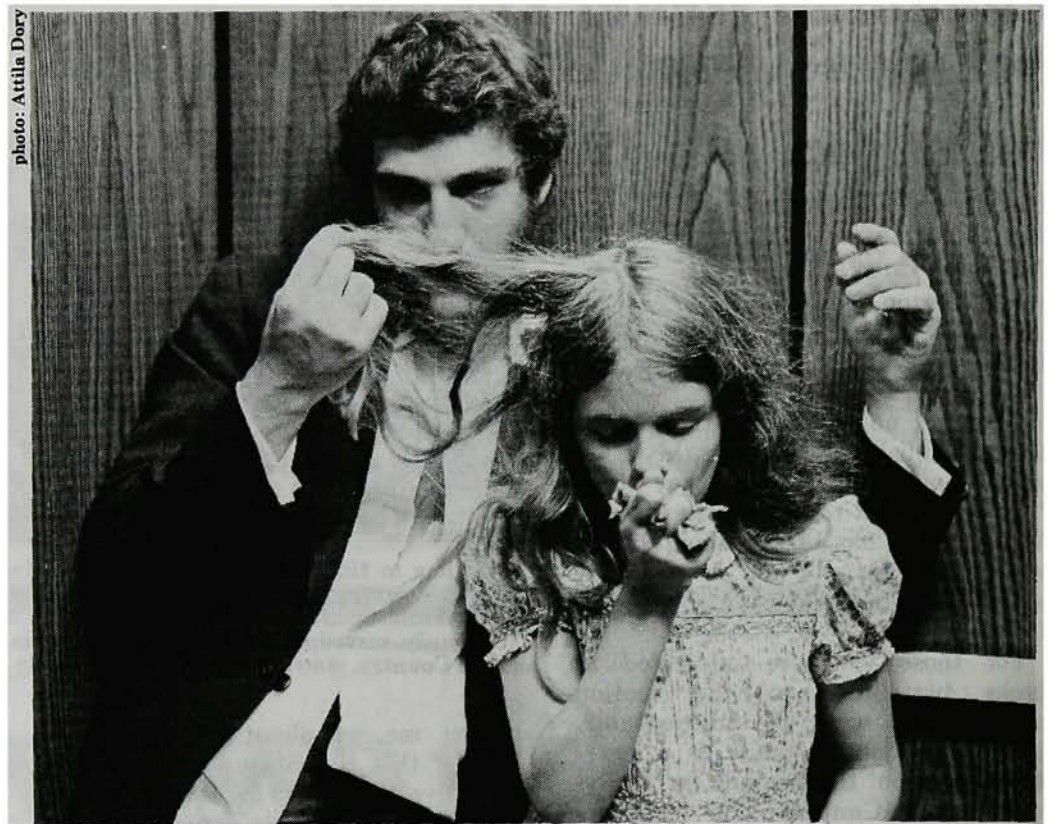
"Sex is the invention of a clever venereal disease."

Well, I really have bad taste. I liked it. I know you're going to say I'm campy and cliquey and queer, but I did like it in my own weird campy way. Because it goes so far, it's so funny-scary awful, so — all those dreams you wouldn't tell anybody, and I mean anybody, about, — all there in front of you, that you've got to be loose, oh yes, very loose indeed, to enjoy this film.

And after all people, what's there to be scared of? Is there really somebody out there who doesn't dream great big colourful eccentric mindboggling blush-making dreams? Once in a while anyway? Ask your favorite psychiatrist. And do you really want Marshall Delaney (I refer to his now famous piece in the back pages of *Saturday Night* entitled "You should know how bad this film is. After all, you paid for it") to tell you your creepo dreams are in bad taste?

I'm sure they are. I hardly ever have a tasteful dream, to be sure. And talking to David Cronenberg, the crazy truthful thing is, this film did come from that special nowhere place where all the wires cross in the back of the mind; from dreamland. True. He simply dreamt it up.

Interestingly, he had another dream while he was making it — a rather intriguing one in which an audience contracted a disease from a film. In the dream he saw this happening, and realized that those affected were feeling antagonistic to those as yet unaffected. The disease itself made people age exceedingly rapidly. Not horribly, just quickly. Listening to him my flesh



The Parasite Murders

began to crawl with the delightful anticipation of yet another creepy ghoully psycho-masochistic squirmy film from out of the back of Cronenberg's head.

So what is the movie about? Well, in a beautifully stated intro we find ourselves in an apartment complex complete unto itself. Called Starliner, it is advertised with all its facilities, as a world of its own, exclusive and separate. Just the kind of place I find frightening, and advertised, as real complexes like this are, with what seems to me the epitome of bad taste. But it takes all kinds.

All the privileged people living there are unaware that a strange, and I mean really *strange*, bug is loose in the building. Cronenberg calls it a 'bug' but in fact it looks like a cross between a slug, a leech and a particularly offensive penis. Don't read on if you're squeamish, because I'm about to tell you it is passed by mouth, as well as creeps, squeezes, slides, plops and oozes toward its various victims.

Now, from all the war films I've seen, and all the bloody bashes and bonks that TV and the action genre movies perpetrate on my frail interior, I have at last been purged. Because this film has blood in such gobs and slatherings, such dribbles, splashes and smears, that *finally*,

Peckinpah notwithstanding, I am freed of ever getting zapped by some smart-aleck's catsup bottle drama again. Or maybe, anyhow. If the effect wears off, I may need another dose, Dr. Cronenberg.

Ivan Reitman produced. No doubt the thought I had when I saw this film, that it would make a good double-bill with his *Cannibal Girls*, was in his mind before the film was ever finished, or maybe before it was even begun? Perhaps. But it might interest you to learn that when Cronenberg first showed him the script he didn't want anything to do with it because he found it so disgusting. And really, *Cannibal Girls*, buzzer-horror warning and manmeat stew and all, is like child's play compared to the depths of depravity *Parasites* discloses.

The narrative flow is reasonably clear, the photography by Robert Saad competent and straightforward, and the acting medium-good to really-ok, with Joe Silver as usual stealing the kudos. But the special effects! Joe Blasco came up for the love of the business from California, where he makes his living doing things like makeup for the Lawrence Welk show (talk about horror...) and he worked some wonders. To dumbfound other special effects men, he even has Alan Migicovsky,

while gazing with horror on the portion of his anatomy under which the breeding parasites are visibly squirming, *raise up* his body with a jerk in order to prove he wasn't using the old false-chest head-through-a-hole-in-the-bed gimmick. Keep it in mind when you see the film and it may just help you get by a bad part.

But I'm not going to tell anymore about the bugs, or the people, or the amazing and ghastly things that happen. This is a film for drive-ins, for the young, for the brave, for the silly people who like movies that are in bad taste and don't care what Delaney thinks.

This is popcorn, not fruitcake, and no one ever said it was good for you. So go, but be warned, you may have quite a time.

Natalie Edwards

John Trent's

It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time

A film by: John Trent. **Screenplay:** Claude Harz. **Cinematography:** Harry Makin. **Music:** William McCauley. **Sound:** Russ Heise. **Editing:** Tony Lower. **Performers:** Anthony Newley, Stefanie Powers, Isaac Hayes, Lloyd Bochner and Yvonne De Carlo. **Producer:** David Perlmutter. **Produced in 1975** by Quadrant Films Ltd. **Colour:** 35mm. **Running time:** 97 minutes. **Distribution in Canada:** Ambassador Films.

When you combine backing from David Perlmutter with Quadrant Productions and director John Trent it means a determined attempt is being made to make money with a movie. And the result in this case is a product that is aimed exclusively at the pocket, by way of the guffaw. A good laugh loosens people up; their laughter rings the bells of a thousand cash registers.

But what makes people laugh? It's always been hard to know in Canada. Is it the dirty snigger of the English low comedy, or the falling object joy of the perpetually naughty-child-teasing-Mom-ism of the States?

Winks and pokes, or crashes and chaos?

Or do we have a style all our own? Looking back over what could rather kindly be called the Canadian comedies of the recent past, we see that the embarrassed shudder with which we greet their memory is almost the best indication of their type. Embarrassment, mortification and mild dirt, mixed with meagre chaos, have in the end created a recipe that cannot fail (and has not so far) to produce a mediocre, rather mirthless comedy. **Another Smith for Paradise? The Rainbow Boys? Only God Knows? Even Why Rock the Boat?**, a rather unusually successful chuckle-headed film, finds the mockery of man of modest amusement only.

In **It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time** a desperate attempt has been made to avoid the merriment of mutter and blush, and create hearty ho-ho's out of a lovely rich olde English mixture of bathroom, bowel and bawd, touched up with some noticeably American types and Canadian comment.

So we have Anthony Newley being relentlessly exuberant and as full of fun as a drunken monkey in a banana boat, giving his all in the buff, or daringly clothed in a handclasp; Lloyd Bochner mortified and terrified by skunks and bears; Moya Fenwick stupefied and ridiculed as a semi-permanently stoned society lady; Stefanie Powers ever-fresh and sexy and manipulative; Isaac Hayes, big and black and bucking a blonde babe (didja see *that!*); and finally Yvonne de Carlo foolish and determined, and more frantic than funny, as an absurd representative of the type of citizen that fights 'progress' when it involves moving her out of her comfortable house.

It's enough to make you cheer on the developers and join the reactionaries.

If you get the impression the film is shallow, superficial, and based on more clichés than there are mosquitos on a June night - you might be right.

But is it *funny*?

Well, that depends on the audience. And what makes the Canadian audience not only laugh, but *pay* to laugh, has yet to be discovered. We can eliminate high comedy, comedy of manners, and much of class comedy and really crude comedy. But for this adolescent mixture of high-jinks, obvious targets, various goings-on that might be considered by rather sedate people as zany or outrageous, a spot of flesh, a hint of sex, a suggestion



It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time

of action, and a lot of general Poking of Fun, well—it remains to be seen.

Technically the film moves well enough, and though the editing is confined to the basic now-a-little-of-this and now-a-little-of-that technique, still it's reasonably brisk and the complicated plot fairly clear. And the cast handles their material professionally. It's also Canadian in the arithmetical sense that one Eng. and one Am. equal one Can.

Actually some may recall the days when Lloyd Bochner was frequently seen on CBC TV, and there may even be those who know that Yvonne de Carlo has some original claim to Canada, having once been born here, but generally one is not aware of a lot of Canadian talent in the film until one examines the roles of the policemen and garbagemen more closely. Is this a subtle comment on Canadian content do you suppose?

At any rate it is hard to think of the film as a Canadian Comedy, even if one knew what one was talking about. Despite a number of Canadian references, some Toronto take-offs, and some scenery that could well be Canadian, the general flavour of the film is so mixed between mid-Atlantic and borderline north American, that all it does successfully is fall between this and that, being neither goose nor gander, but rather more like a mating between Mary Tyler Moore and the Carry On gang.

And if this causes our fellow nationals from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island to hold their sides and groan for a break from the merciless joy of hilarity, we may be sorry we