

FILM REVIEWS

Jean Lafleur's

Ilsa the Tigress

d: Jean Lafleur, asst. d: Daniel Haufmann, sc: Marvin McGara, ph: Richard Ciupka, sp. eff: André Trielli, Angelo Rizzi, ed: Debra Karjala, sd: Danny Goldberg, a.d: Claude Marchand, cost: Nicolletta Massone, l.p. Dyanne Thorne, Michel Morin, Tony Angelo, Terry Coady, p: Julian Parnell, loc. man: Phil Desjardins, p. man: Claude Léger, p.c. Cinepix Inc., 1977, col: 35mm, dist: Cinepix Inc. running time: 90 minutes.

Big-breasted rather than big-hearted, Dyanne Thorne plays the blonde huntress Ilsa, 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.

Ilsa the Tigress doesn't waste time with niceties, but gets right down to providing the special kind of feed the viewer paid for. Satisfaction, that's what Ilsa offers. She's been around (as the She-Wolf of the SS and in the Harem of the Oil Shieks), 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 Ilsa 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 *Ilsa* offer us thrills and escapes in rapid succession which are satisfying

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 Ilsa, the Siberian labor-camp commandant, sternly controls the destinies of her many slaves, both willing and unwilling. Speaking in basic English, and slowly, the dialogue is almost physically ballooned over the heads of the characters as they strut and pose their way through the sequences.



Ilsa preparing torture of another kind

From *Ilsa* 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 Ilsa 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. Ilsa's lusty cohorts practically fill a fireplace with the glass they smash while on a competitive toasting to all the various hair on Ilsa's body. And when Ilsa 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. Ilsa 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 *Ilsa 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 Ilsa'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 Ilsa, 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

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, p. 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, exec. 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.