



very good science fiction films that the odds say you have never seen before. Why do I think you haven't seen them? Well, very simply, nobody wants to show them. What do you think of when you think of science fiction films? Perhaps you think of space operas like STAR WARS. Or stories set in future societies like

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BLADERUNNER. Generally most people who think of science fiction think of something to dazzle the eye. You think of special effects. More fool you. At least that is what the cable companies and the TV stations think of your tastes. Why would anyone watch a sci-fi film that doesn't have special effects? I want to show two science fiction films that are just actors in front of a camera. These are two films in which the entire science fiction content is carried by the words and by the actions. One of the films doesn't even have color. When the festival is over you can tell me if you really missed the whizz-bang special effects. On Thursday, April 27, at 7 PM the Leeperhouse film festival will present:

Effective without Effects:

UNEARTHLY STRANGER (1963) dir. by John Krish

QUEST FOR LOVE (1971) dir. by Ralph Thomas

In UNEARTHLY STRANGER, a London research team is working on the secret of a very new approach to space exploration. They are having mixed results. On one hand, they seem to be very near a breakthrough that will allow interstellar exploration within the very near future. On the other hand, key scientists are dying in apparently impossible ways. And then there is the little matter of a different security investigation that is also coming up with difficult-to-explain results. The film stars respected stage actor John Neville, Gabriella Licudi, and Philip Stone, PBS fans should watch for Jean Marsh.

While UNEARTHLY STRANGER is a dark and disturbing film QUEST FOR LOVE is somewhat lighter with a little more adventure. This is one of the examples I give of an adaptation of a short story that is actually more intelligent and enjoyable than its source. It is based on "Random Quest," a lesser story by the very good British science fiction writer John Wyndham. And people with access to the story may want to read it before seeing the film. It will not

spoil the film since the film builds a whole story around what is little more than a situation in the story. Colin Trafford (played Tom Bell) is an unmarried physicist whose experiment goes wrong. He suddenly finds himself in a world that thinks he is a successful playwright. John Kennedy was never assassinated, there was no WWII, and things are very confusing and different. And the other Colin's wife (played by Joan Collins) is adding to the confusion. Also starring are Denholm Elliot and Laurence Naismith. [-mrl]

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## 2. DON JUAN DEMARCO ( film review by Mark R. Leeper);

Capsule: Jeremy Leven's message is that a groovy madness is better than a hard realism. Miguel de Cervantes did it much better and

Leven's Don Juan fantasy is too much a burlesque to work. Brando's performance shows not his expected strengths but his perennial weaknesses as an actor. Rating: low 0 (-4 to +4)

It is an old theme to juxtapose the cruel, real world with the seductive fantasy of a madman. Certainly that is the power of Cervantes's DON QUIXOTE. And there is some attempt in DON JUAN DEMARCO to capture some of the power of DON QUIXOTE or perhaps even the strengths of Anthony Harvey's THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS. But for such a story to work, the fantasy under-story has to be compelling. The Don Juan story of DON JUAN DEMARCO is less a compelling fantasy that captures the viewer and more a satiric burlesque. Lord Byron's near-epic poem version of the adventures of the amorous nobleman was itself intended to be a light social satire, perhaps no more compelling than CANDIDE. Jeremy Leven's screenplay takes three incidents from what was apparently the Byron version of the story. (He does that loosely, incidentally; Leven changes some of the character names and the island incident should have preceded the harem captivity. Also in the Byron, Juan's father died when Juan was a very young boy. Still, of the many versions of the Don

Juan story, Leven seems to be basing his on the Byron.) But the story works only if Leven can make the reader wistfully wish the fantasy were true. There would be nothing compelling about a patient straddling the real world and, say, that of PEEWEE'S BIG ADVENTURE. Rather than having DeMarco's fantasies give resonance to his madness and make us want to believe them, they leave us with nothing we really feel like believing in either the sane or the mad world. It is one of several miscalculations novelist Jeremy Leven made in directing DON JUAN DEMARCO based on his own screenplay.

The story begins with Don Juan DeMarco (Johnny Depp) dressed in the clothing of a Spanish nobleman, but we quickly discover he is in a modern American city. He seduces one last woman and then goes to commit suicide for the love of the one woman he could not win. Psychiatrist Jack Mickler (Marlon Brando) talks him out of the suicide by playing along with the imaginings. When Don Juan is admitted to an asylum for ten day's observation, Mickler arranges to do the observing. There the doctor finds himself drawn into Don Juan's charming fantasies and finds that the young man's pleasant delusions transform his own life and his relation with his wife (Faye Dunaway).

Johnny Depp does a fairly good job as the seductive Spaniard, adding one more likable misfit to what is becoming a long list of such roles. Heresy Alert! Marlon Brando does as well as he is physically able to do with the role but it has been a long time since he has turned in a really good performance--in fact, forty-one years! Since THE WILD ONE, he has relied on his physical presence and his natural speech patterns, not unlike John Wayne.

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Today he is rotund, he lisps, and he is surprisingly in need of elocution lessons. Dunaway puts just a bit more edge in her role, but has no chemistry with Brando. It is unclear what it would mean to have chemistry with Brando in his current state. Bob Dishy is unusually restrained as the chief doctor of the hospital.

A gentle fantasy along the same lines could have been a very welcome film, but DON JUAN DEMARCO fails in the execution. I give it a low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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### 3. ROB ROY (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: We don't get many serious films about legendary heroes like this any more. Scotland's famous outlaw comes to the screen as a sort of Highland Robin Hood in a plot that would have done Errol Flynn proud. Nicely photographed also, the film is a pleasant surprise. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

Like Robin Hood, or for that matter Billy the Kid, Rob Roy (actually Robert Macgregor--nicknamed Roy for his red hair) was a real outlaw who has passed into the realm of legend and folklore. The film ROB ROY is based on these legends, though no specific source is credited. It bears little connection to the Sir Walter Scott novel of the same name, except that the same outlaw appears in the novel. Instead, the film is based on historic and legendary accounts of the outlaw, the best known of which was "The Highland Rogue" by Daniel Defoe. On a very high level, the story of the film is accurate, at least to the legends, although clearly there are pieces of other film adventures mixed into this film's plot. The stories say that he did borrow money for a cattle venture from a former employer, the first duke of Montrose, who held lands near Rob Roy's. When Rob Roy was unable to pay the loan back in 1712, he lost his home and was outlawed. To survive he turned bandit, mostly preying on Montrose and his tenants but remaining friendly with another neighbor, the duke of Argyll. Though the film invents some, this part of the plot is true to the legend of Rob Roy.

This film is the stuff of the old matinees of the 40s. The decision to make this film was likely inspired by the success of THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS, and with the exception of that film, it is a sub-genre we see too rarely these days. Too often what could be this type of film comes out more as a poorly-conceived self-satire like the bitterly disappointing ROBIN HOOD, PRINCE OF THIEVES. That film had little accuracy to the legends of Robin Hood, threw in devices like telescopes that have no place in the legends, and had a Sheriff of Nottingham playing way over the top.

ROB ROY is a much more intelligent adaptation of a heroic legend.

While being the sort of larger-than-life historical heroic adventure that would have starred Douglas Fairbanks and Errol Flynn, it respects itself and its source material. The major stylistic differences include better photography, a little sex, and a fascination with the obscure (but obviously considered very important) historical fact that the period shown predated indoor plumbing.

The story is much the same as above. Rob Roy (Liam Neeson) is an occasional thief who has a strong sense of honor concerning his word. He is made an outlaw by three particularly nasty (and well-cast) screen villains, the Duke of Montrose (John Hurt), his assistant Killearn (played by Brian Cox, Hannibal Lector from MANHUNTER), and, worst of all, Archibald Cunningham (Tim Roth--Pumpkin from PULP FICTION), whose slight build and exaggerated effete, foppish manners hide a sadist and a clever strategist as well as a deadly swordsman. Rob Roy's wife Mary, more earthy and less bloodthirsty than Walter Scott's version of her, is played by Jessica Lange. The duke of Argyll is played with dignity by Andrew Keir (who played Quatermass in QUATERMASS AND THE PIT, a.k.a. FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH). Finally, as a fellow clansman, is Eric Stoltz in a real departure for him. To an American ear, the Scottish accents are thick enough to make listening an effort. To me they sounded accurate, but I am willing to take a second opinion from a Scot.

ROB ROY has gotten the treatment of a big spectacular. Karl Walter Lindenlaub's camera takes full advantage of the Highland scenery, using wide screen to capture a symmetry in the mountain landscapes. His frame typically will be centered between two hills of equal height at the two sides of the frame with a pleasing downward curve between for a valley shot. That speaks of careful camera placement. He uses this pleasing symmetry of his shots to counterbalance the negative effect of the fog-shrouded mountains. The opening showing the MacGregor Clan running over the hills seems like an allusion to the opening of THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS, but in general Michael Caton-Smith goes for unusual effects. A key sword fight is done without underscoring music, leaving the actors to build the suspense rather than to have a composer create the emotion, an approach used all too rarely.

ROB ROY is a well-made heroic adventure film with a little more sex and grossness than a 1940s MGM adventure film might have had, but not more than what modern audiences expect. I give this film a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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