

FILM RATINGS

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THERE'S NOTHING OUT THERE

Directed by: Rolfe Kanefsky. Prism Video, 5/93, 90 mins. With: Craig Peck, Wendy Bednarz, Mark Collier, Bonnie Bowers.

This is a strictly amateurish spoof about a bunch of teens on spring break being picked off one-by-one by a green alien with sharp teeth. The monster, designed by Ken Quinn, is a rubbery puppet wisely shown mostly in glimpses, because it loses all credibility when seen for more than 30 seconds. In the tradition of the pulps of 50 years ago, this alien is interested in eating the men and raping the women, which is what you'd expect from a film that makes the female cast bare their breasts and run around in bikinis in almost every scene.

Worst performance is by lead Craig Peck, whose eyes constantly flick directly into the camera as he declaims his lines as if in a bad high school play. Gimmick is that his character has seen every horror film ever made and points out all the warnings, foreshadowings and things not to do, which his friends naturally ignore. The film, which enjoyed a brief and surprising New York theatrical run before its current life on video, is not aided by bad photography and relentlessly inappropriate music. ○ Judith Harris

MY BOYFRIEND'S BACK

Directed by: Bob Balaban. Buena Vista, 6/93, 84 mins. With: Andrew Lowery, Traci Lind, Darryl Zorn.

This makes two in a row for Balaban: two bad comedies about cannibalism with Mary Beth Hurt (the other being 1989's even less successful PARENTS). Dull script (originally entitled JOHNNY ZOMBIE) equates teen angst with zombieism, when lovestruck Lowery is killed but returns the next day in hope of attending the prom with the girl he worships but never had the courage to approach. The few laughs, all displayed in the trailer, are provided solely by some aging character actor actors: Bob Dishy, Paul Dooley and Austin Pendleton. ○ Judith Harris

SUPER MARIO BROS.

Directed by: Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel. Buena Vista 5/93, 104 mins. With: Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo, Dennis Hopper.

SUPER MARIO BROS. is an ugly, noisy, stupid mess. A long charmless buildup and frequent dull spots

WILDER NAPALM exhibits many of the same tropes that characterized director Glenn Gordon Caron's successful television series MOONLIGHTING.



Candyman (Tony Todd) claims Helen Lyle (Virginia Madsen) as his lover in life and death in CANDYMAN.

are sure to bore the intended kiddie audience. Yothi, the delightful animatronic dinosaur, is the most interesting character. Unfortunately, he gets little screen time and isn't important to the plot, which involves a parallel universe beneath Brooklyn where dinosaurs evolved into humanoids, led by Dennis Hopper, who has plans to take over the world. This is like a Three Stooges film, wherein each character is stupider than the previous one. The ending leaves the door wide open for the intended sequel. One can only hope it's better than this sad affair. ● Judith Harris

METEOR MAN

Directed by: Robert Townsend. MGM, 6/93, 100 mins. With: Robert Townsend, James Earl Jones, Maria Gibbs, Robert Guillaume.

Messy, by-the-books fantasy of an ordinary, inner-city man transformed into a very reluctant super-hero-cum-neighborhood guardian, via the convenient intervention of a "magical, green meteor." Director/writer/star Robert Townsend's strong suits are a satirical mind and an acerbic wit capable of cutting to the core of race issues without invoking the ire of the targets being prodded. Unfortunately, neither trait is much in evidence here (the closest METEOR MAN comes is a wicked scene in which Sinbad plays a newly Afro-centralized man putting the make on Townsend's love-interest—"This is my first black girlfriend," he enthuses). The film is horrendously structured: events occur with no respect for what preceded and themes are raised and dropped in the span of one scene (including the aforementioned love-interest and Townsend's main theme of an individual's responsibility to his/her community). Face it, if there's any sign that a film needed more work at the conceptual stage, it's a fade-out suggesting that a stand-off between Mafia, police and gang-bangers is a happy ending. Robert, are you sure this is the message you wanted to convey? ○ Dan Persons

WILDER NAPALM

Directed by: Glenn Gordon Caron. TriStar Pictures, 5/93, 110 mins. With: Arliss Howard, Dennis Quaid, Debra Winger, Jim Varney.

Wilder and Wallace (Arliss Howard and Dennis Quaid) are a pair of pyrokinetic brothers in love with Vi-

da (Debra Winger). Reserved, ironically-named Wilder gets the girl; aggressive, short-tempered Wallace burns off all of his brother's hair and disappears for five years only to return with a carnival in tow, a near-fatal fury over the love he lost, and plans to blow the boys' cover on DAVID LETTERMAN. WILDER NAPALM exhibits many of the tropes that characterized the director's successful TV series, MOONLIGHTING, including the splitting of the id and superego into two opposing, yet appealingly-shaded characters and a taste for the supremely offball moment, such as when a volunteer fire department spontaneously bursts (sorry) into doo-wop arrangements while fighting fires. That predilection to reach for the oddball when the merely ordinary would do comes close to destroying the film—particularly in a pivotal scene wherein the two brothers fight over Vida, a sequence so filled with miscues and ill-conceived histrionics, that one loses all sympathy for the participants. That the film manages to recover says much for Caron's talents and for the skills of all three actors. That somebody here failed to say "No," to some of WILDER NAPALM'S more fanciful notions is the film's downfall. ● Dan Persons

HOCUS POCUS

Directed by: Keny Ortega. Buena Vista, 6/93, 95 mins. With: Bette Midler, Sarah Jessica Parker, Kathy Najimy.

Mick Garris proves he can't write every bit as badly as he can't direct, with this silly tale of Salem witches brought back to life in modern times. But why put all the blame on him when there's Midler to kick around? This film was originally intended as a star vehicle for her until Disney screened the results and switched gears, marketing it as a kiddie movie. Her camp performance comes across like a drag queen's (Divine would have been much better, but she's dead). Her one good moment is singing "I Put a Spell on You," but that hardly warrants the star treatment which places her dead center in every shot in which she appears, relegating her co-stars to the edges of the frame. Did she have this put in her contract for fear of being upstaged? That could easily have happened: Parker not only makes a far more alluring witch; she also gives a better performance. Director Ortega stumbles in every conceivable way, especially with the witches' return from the grave which takes place off-screen. Best moments are a talking cat and a headless zombie, both of whom are well-realized in the effects department; the cat especially gets all the best lines and upstages his human co-stars. Makes one appreciate the superiority of the Nicholas Hoeg-Jim Henson collaboration, THE WITCHES. ● Steve Blodrowski

OVERLOOKED & UNDERRATED

CANDYMAN

Directed by: Bernard Rose. Columbia TriStar Home Video, 3/93, 98 mins. With: Virginia Madsen, Tony Todd, Xander Berkeley, Kasi Lemmons.

For those who missed this in the theaters, here's another chance to catch this superb film. Based on *The Forbidden*, it's the best Clive Barker adaptation yet. Madsen stars as a grad student researching urban legends. For her thesis, she chooses the story of Candyman, a hook-handed murderer who supposedly appears if you say his name into a mirror five times. She soon finds that Candyman is no myth and what he has in store for her is far worse than anything she could have imagined. Madsen, often stuck with second-rate material, finally has the chance to show off her talent. Co-star Tony Todd is also excellent as the frightening and hypnotic Candyman. The technical aspects of the movie are just as good. Especially noteworthy are the Candyman graffiti, the gothic music by Philip Glass and the cinematography. Although there's some gore involved, this film doesn't rely on pure shock value to chill you to the bone. ●●●● Karen L. Joslin