

“You Only Live Twice” at Palms

Review

Joe Fineman

1967

When Saturday matinees were only two bits and weekly serials dragged on endlessly, James Bond was barely a flicker on a distant horizon. Broccoli and Saltzman with Panavision, Technicolor, United Artists, Sean Connery and a bottomless shipload of gimmickry have thrown us back to our childhood.

Until now, the most un-cinematic bait drew the fish out of the woodwork; Lesbians, homosexuals, a sadistic grandmother, a unique air corps and a frequently bedridden James Bond. The utter shock of the latest Bond thriller is that it really clears the deck and settles down to telling an exciting story.

“Alfie” was Lewis Gilbert’s most recent directorial effort prior to “You Only Live Twice” and a considerably better time he has of it too. As if we require another spark for World War Three, Ian Fleming provides it here. SPECTRE is at it again trying to play off Russia against the good old USA in order to take over the world. With the aid of Japanese Secret Agent Tiger Tanaka, Bond must upset their plan.

What the producers seem to have accomplished with the fifth Bondism, is an honest marriage of script writer Dahl with the competent presence of Gilbert.

Dahl has quickened the dialogue and effectively marshaled Connery’s comic undertone.

As usual, Bond’s compliment of protective devices challenges even the best science fiction writers. He races around in a Toyota equipped with closed circuit television and girlfriend Akiko Wakabayashi. Between rocket firing cigarettes and a highly maneuverable minicopter, Bond is superbly well defended.

The frosting on the cake is the invasion of and subsequent destruction of SPECTRE’s sub-volcanic mind center. The finale survives. as a multi-ringed demolition circus with particularly confident editing allowing for full demonstrations of various oriental means of self defense.

Fire haired Karin Dor is the latest of James Bond’s bedable enemies and she makes it no less interesting than Pussy Galore. With aid from Akiko Wakabayashi and Mie Hama (Kissy Suzuki) ample skin is in evidence.

Despite Connery’s claim that he’s to complete two additional Fleming features, his wrinkles, exploding midrift and sex appeal are all working to his disadvantage. It has been five years since “Dr. No” and there is every indication that “You Only Live Twice” has tried to remove the super-man image if only because, photogenically speaking, Bond and his contingent are aging beyond what fiction intended. Bond must mature as his audience grows younger.

Getting back to the cinema, there is quite a bit of evidence that Mr. Gilbert utilized inscrutable tact in matching the terribly contrived ingenuity of producers Broccoli and Saltzman with Mr. Dahl’s superbly adequate words. Perhaps the dialogue has kept closer to what Fleming would have preferred but stuck close enough to the necessities of the medium.

Whether this menage of the Bond medium will go down in its own appeal as did Tarzan and Andy Hardy is something else all together. The others grew arthritic and suffered a painful expiration. When “Goldfinger” and “Thunderball” appeared, I concluded that only a mordant future lay ahead for 007.

Perhaps “You Only Live Twice” was a pleasant exception. At least we can look forward to the 6th in the series with a good taste in our mouth.

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