

## Document Citation

Title	<b>The trashy fun in June's junkpile</b>
Author(s)	Joy Gould Boyum
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Alien, Scott, Ridley, 1979

# The Trashy Fun in June's Junkpile

By JOY GOULD BOYUM

June—school lets out, books get packed away and the heat rises to dull our wits in an enveloping lethargy. Or at least that's what Hollywood must assume is taking place at this time each year, when it traditionally releases its annual spate of mindless movies manufactured, it would seem, solely to match such a mood. Come June, we are inevitably faced with some thoroughly moronic tale of horror, usually in the deep blue sea; some stultifyingly stupid adventure whose only distinction is its all-star cast; as well as some mentally retarded comedy laden with puerile puns and foolish pratfalls.

But as all inveterate moviegoers know, there's trash and then there's trash. Put another way, some bad movies are intoler-

## On Film

"Winter Kills"

"Alien"

"Beyond the Poseidon Adventure"

"The Prisoner of Zenda"

able to sit through, while others, in spite of and sometimes because of their awfulness, turn out to be entertaining. Though it's difficult to say just why this is so, a current crop of movies—all of them bad, but not all of them boring—offers some suggestions.

Take "Winter Kills," a thriller with comic overtones, dealing with the efforts of the young scion of one of America's wealthiest families to discover who masterminded the murder of his brother, the President of the United States, some 15 years ago. The film is still another of those paranoid exploitations of political assassination. It is a particularly unsatisfying one in that its plot is incomprehensible, many of its performances are overstated and worst of all, as a cinematic *roman a clef* its unkind vision and revelations make it decidedly unsavory.

Yet there is something to enjoy in this mess—if it's approached in the right spirit. Inspired by a Richard Condon novel, the film has managed to retain at least some of that author's extravagant and amusing conceits. Director William Richert has also supplied the whole with an energetic pace—we may not always know where we are or why we're there, but wherever we are, we've gotten there fast and tend to leave even faster.

More importantly, the film's flaws are of such a flamboyant and fantastic kind that they themselves serve to delight. If we are struck by the incongruity of the film's parts, we also can't help but be amused by the wild effect of their juxtaposition; if we are taken aback by the baroque quality of the decor, we also can't help but be diverted by the inventiveness of its conception; if we are aghast at the irreverence of the film's innuendoes, we also can't help but be somewhat awed by their audacity. And a movie that features John Huston as a Machiavellian millionaire who appears in a little red bikini boasting of his President's vital sex life, or casts Elizabeth Taylor in a silent cameo as the hefty procuress for a priapic chief executive has left canons of good taste so far behind as to make their application irrelevant.

Like "Winter Kills," "Alien," this summer's multimillion-dollar outer-space extravaganza, also doesn't make much sense. Though presumably science fiction, it's more an old-fashioned, empty-headed horror movie, whose purpose is solely and unrelentingly to frighten us. Telling a tale of the besieged crew of an exploratory spaceship who have inadvertently picked up a predatory alien, director Ridley Scott doesn't seem to care much what logic his movie violates to that end. The problem is that "Alien" ends up not so much terrifying as nauseating: the extra-terrestrial blob that serves as the source of its scares has the most revolting demeanor and the most disgusting deportment in the universe. Changing its shape at the movie-maker's convenience, it appears as a toothy worm, a gelatinous octopus or a scaly gill-man, which attaches itself to faces, settles down in tracheas or bursts out of intestines.

Still, if you can suppress both your sensibilities and your demand for sense, "Alien" can provide amusement. There's that spaceship, which—chrome and plastic, flashing lights and molded furniture—is a wonder of design. There are the film's terrific special effects; taking a trip through the Universe via the magic of movies is always good for a spine-tingle or two. Then there is the amusing assortment of feminist twists in "Alien"—a computer who not only speaks in a female voice but is in fact called "Mother," or the ship's female flight captain (Sigourney Weaver), who turns out to be the boldest and bravest of her colleagues.

"Winter Kills" and "Alien," then, are two bad movies with redeeming features, tolerable and entertaining for a humid night in the nubes. Two other summer offerings, however, are to be avoided at all costs—especially the cost of admission. "Beyond the Poseidon Adventure" is a good deal less involving sequel than the original. Telling an absurdly contrived tale of salvage attempts and various other deep-sea doings, it puts its all-star cast through such foolishness as to even make the likes of Michael Caine lose his sex appeal and Sally Field her spunky charm. Filmed almost exclusively in the dark and dank bowels of an upside-down ocean liner, it offers neither interesting decor nor compelling special effects to provide some sort of distraction. Worse, as directed by Irwin Allen the movie has no sense of humor about itself and becomes insufferable.

Sad to say, the new Peter Sellers movie surprisingly has no humor either. No less than the fifth version of "The Prisoner of Zenda," this corny story of mistaken identity in a romantic European land has evidently always appealed to moviemakers because it lends itself to amusing visuals (the same actor always plays prince and pauper and always shakes his own hand). By now, however, such tricks are as stale as the tale itself, and so is Peter Sellers' repertoire of comic foibles—speech defects and the like. Quite simply, "Prisoner" is dogged and dull, lacking the flamboyance and fantasy that, if unable in themselves to transform bad into good, certainly could have made it the kind of trashy movie which just might have provided summer fun.