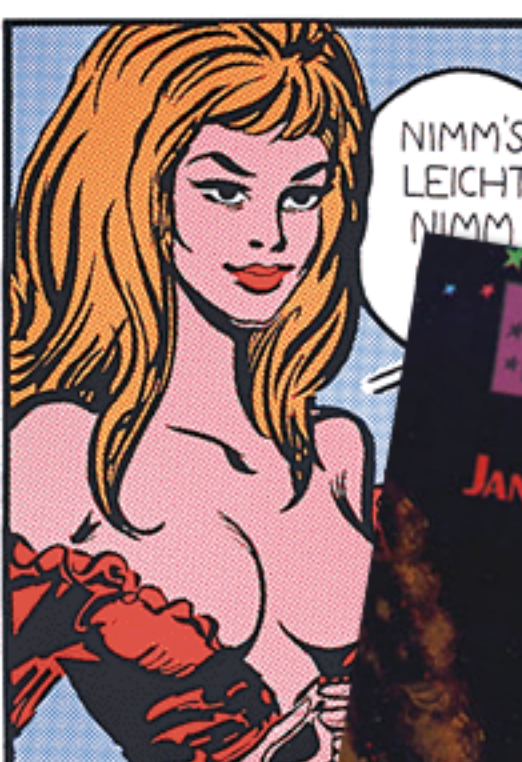


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Ba, ba, ba, ba, Barbarella!



PARAMOUNT PICTURES PRESENTS A DELO DOLBY DIGITAL PRODUCTION
JANE FONDA BARBARELLA



Barbarella Redux

In general, I like campy cult movies. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (“Dammit, Janet, I love you”), *Escape from New York* (“Snake Plis-skin? I thought you were dead?”), *Plan Nine from Outer Space* (“A ray of sunlight is made up of many atoms”) — I can watch them over and over, to the point where my wife is contacting a divorce attorney and beyond. So knowing my predisposition toward the quirky or entertainingly bad, and egged on by a number of postings on the Internet, I rented the lovely new DVD of *Barbarella*.

Now *Barbarella* is a movie that I’ve been hearing bits and whispers about for years. I heard it was so bad it was funny. I heard it was so funny it was bad. I heard all sorts of other things, some of which I dare

ing that had to be wrestled from it like *Natural Born Killers* (“We’re not killing anybody on our wedding day”), or even a film so good you can’t stop running it over in your head like *Pulp Fiction* (“And you know what they call a Quarter Pounder with Cheese in Paris?”). Instead, this was a film that got me thinking thoughts like, “Why didn’t Jane Fonda put that whole ‘apologize for my behavior during the Vietnam War’ thing behind her at first opportunity so that she could spend the rest of her life tracking down, buying up, and destroying copies of this film?” Bill Cosby had the sense to try and stop *Leonard Part 6* (“There’s no way I’ll ever get close enough to this film to get a quote from it”) from ever seeing the light of day (or so I’ve heard) — why didn’t Jane do the same?

I mean seriously now. *Barbarella* has the depth of soft-core porn (“Oh! My pants!”),

Bill Chambers of *Film Freak Central* calls 1968's *Barbarella* “The Wizard of Oz for the horny.”

not repeat in front of a mixed audience. Besides, it was produced by Dino De Laurentiis — a man at least partially responsible for two of my favorite camp movies of all time, *Army of Darkness* (“Good, bad, I’m the guy with the gun”) and 1980’s *Flash Gordon* (“Flash, I love you, but we only have fourteen hours to save the Earth!”). So far as I know, De Laurentiis had nothing to do with *Big Trouble in Little China* (“I know, there’s a problem with your face”), *Evil Dead II* (“We just cut up our girlfriend with a chainsaw. Does that sound ‘fine’?”), *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure* (“Is this something you’d like to share with the rest of us, Amazing Larry?”), or Adam West’s *Batman* (“Some days you just can’t get rid of a bomb”), but I love those movies too and couldn’t resist mentioning them.

So anyway, that’s where I was coming from. I expected a bad movie, a little camp, and about two hours of brainless entertainment.

How wrong I was — at least about the “entertainment” part.

The thing that surprised me most about *Barbarella* was the amount of thought I was forced to put into it. This wasn’t a movie like *Fight Club* (“Sticking feathers up your butt does not make you a chicken”) that you have to watch twice before you really start to get it, or a beast with a mean-

the maturity of *Porkies* (“I’m gonna make a man out of you yet, boy”), the special effects genius of *H. R. Pufnstuf* (“Help me, Jimmy!”), the scientific accuracy of *The 700 Club* (“[Ear piercing] is an emblem of Satanism”), and the acting brilliance of something produced to earn a merit badge. Its music sounds like it was thrown together by the folks who scored any given episode of *The Love Boat* (“I’m Julie, your cruise director”) after scoring some bad mushrooms.

I’m sure that there are some of you (okay, maybe one of you) out there who will want to more than berate me for not just loving this film. You’ll say that I didn’t get it, or that I’m being too strict, or that my mother was exposed to radiation, or something. But the fact of the matter is, there’s a difference between a good campy movie and a bad one, and *Barbarella* doesn’t seem to know that difference. For example, *The Blues Brothers* (“We’re on a mission from God”) is over the top and ridiculous, but it knows it is and turns those liabilities into assets. And even more important, when you’re watching *Blues Brothers*, you can tell that its creators knew how silly it was. The same goes for *Robo-cop* (“I’d buy that for a dollar!”), *The Brady Bunch Movie* (“As a wise man once said, ‘Wherever you go, there you are’”),



and *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* (“Wherever you go, there you are.”)

But *Barbarella* isn’t like that. During painful scene after painful scene, I couldn’t tell whether the director was failing at being funny or failing at being serious. There are moments that are obviously played (lame) for laughs, such as when *Barbarella* answers a video phone call from the president while she’s in the nude, but there are also scenes (such as when *Barbarella* stands bound to a pole while metal-toothed dolls try to bite her) which look like they’re bad attempts to be scary,

and near the end of the movie whole crowds of good people are wiped out without a blink. If the movie’s supposed to be silly, why the serious stuff? Did the director and his clot of writers think that the violence was funny? And if so, couldn’t they have let the rest of us in on the joke?

Okay, okay, okay. So I’m ranting. For the sake of journalistic balance, I’ll admit that there are ten good things about *Barbarella*.

Namely:

1. — Duran Duran named themselves after a character in the film, and despite that I still really like their music (you now all know how old I am).

2. — In the film, there’s this woman named The Great Tyrant who looks exceedingly cool dressed in leather wearing an eye patch and flipping knives around. Unfortunately, she only looks like that when she’s in disguise to mix amongst her subjects, and she’s only in disguise for about a minute and a half of the film. During that minute and a half, *Barbarella* utters her one really good line in the film: “My name’s not Pretty Pretty, it’s *Barbarella*.” (Other than that, *Barbarella*’s most memorable dialogue runs the gambit from “Oh!” to “La la la!”)

3. — It makes lame comedies like *Dude*,

Where’s My Car? (“Dude, where’s my car?”) look like Oscar material in comparison.

4. — Marcel Marceau’s in the movie. He doesn’t particularly stand out or anything, but it’s funny that he’s there, and he has more lines in *Barbarella* than he did in *Silent Movie* (“”).

5. — *Barbarella* joins the ranks of films like *One Million Years B.C.* (“Ug!”) as an example of how young filmmakers can save money by not squandering a meager budget on non essentials like significant clothing for the star.

6. — If you think gratuitous nudity is enough to merit recommending a film, then you’ve come to the right place.

7. — There’s a point an hour into the movie where, for about 10 minutes, it’s actually pretty funny. The funny part starts right after *Barbarella* escapes from the incredibly ineffective killer parakeets, when she meets the leader of the rebellion. For those 10 minutes, maybe a quarter of an hour, you can really see how this could have been a good film. I note that the movie has eight writer credits listed, which comes down to about 12 minutes of screen time per screenwriter. Perhaps there was just one guy who had a clue and these were his 12 minutes.

8. — The transfer to the new DVD isn’t exactly perfect, but the disk itself is shiny, shiny, shiny.

9. — Drew Barrymore is apparently working on a new *Barbarella* film, but it’s an entirely new adaptation of the *Barbarella* comics, not a remake of the original. That’s good news. I think.

10. — It isn’t going to haunt me for the rest of my life. How do I know? Well, when I mentioned to my wife that I’d watched the thing so that I could write this review, her response was one of puzzlement. Why did I have to see the thing again — we’d rented it when we were dating. And here it hadn’t seemed familiar at all when I watched it. Which, comforting as it may be, leaves me with this chilling thought — what other horrible films are out there that I’ve blocked out? *Exorcist II* (“If Pazuzu comes for you I will spit a leopard”)? *Hudson Hawk* (“Pope warned me never to trust the CIA”)? *The All Nude World of Drew Carrey* (“Aaaaaaaa!!!!!!”)? Truly, the possibilities are too horrible to imagine. ~

—Dominick Cancilla

