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CINEMA

Where the Green Ants Dream

Written and directed by Werner Herzog; with Bruce Spence, Ray Berrett, Norman Kaye.

I've always liked Werner Herzog's films for their dreamy visual style and eerie soundtracks, sometimes accomplished by as little as a barely perceptible wind whistling in the background. *Where the Green Ants Dream* is an unusual film for Herzog because of his change of approach and shift in subject matter. Gone are the passionate studies of madmen and misfits; in its place is an anthropological study of Australia with a matter of social justice at its heart.

Bruce Spence (the copter pilot of *Mad Max*) stars as the well-meaning geologist Arnold Hackett, a company man leading a series of experiments in the Australian outback. Enter the Aborigines, who refuse to allow the test blasting to continue, for it lies on sacred ground. "This is where the green ants dream," an elder proclaims while they stand in the line of blasting, refusing to budget an inch. Hackett is, of course, dismayed. He has been working in what he believed to be govern-

ment lands and had procured about every document possible to assure legality. But this new problem is less a legal than a moral dilemma. According to the land acts law of the last century, lands were clearly set aside for Aboriginal territories and other lands were nationalized by the government. The Aborigines had been there for 40,000 years, though, longer than any white government has been around, and it is sacred ground. "What would you do," an elder asks Hackett, "if I take a bulldozer and dig up your church?"

Hackett is a man caught in the middle. He is an employee of the company and believes in his experiments, but he also respects the positions of the natives. He becomes something of a go-between; the natives respect his curiosity and honesty, and the company knows they will talk to him. But this position leaves him little to do but stand by and watch the battle. This is one of the problems of the picture. Hackett is a passive character even when he begins to explore and discover the Aboriginal culture, and Spence fails to inject any spark of vigor into the character. He seems swept along by events, and it is difficult to see the moral questioning his character is going through. At the end he comes to a decision, but we're not exactly sure how he came to it or what exactly that decision is.

One of the elements that keeps the film moving is a low key

humor that punctuates the documentary-like bulk of the film. Especially funny is the company lawyer Norman Ferguson, played by Norman Kaye (of Paul Cox's *Lonely Hearts* and *Man of Flowers*) with his usual wit. The humor is an unexpected surprise, as this type of gentle wit is not a trademark of Herzog's work. Perhaps his association with Paul Cox is having an effect on his work (remember Herzog as the father in the 8mm flashbacks in Cox's *Man of Flowers*? Cox returns the favor by essaying the cameo role of a company photographer here.)

The best moments of the film are the opening and closing, which include some of the most beautiful and desolate shots of the Australian outback I've ever seen (Australia turns out very much to be Herzog country). The ending especially takes an eerie turn to the supernatural where the plot is no longer spelled out in capital letters but rather suggested.

Where the Green Ants Dream is an odd film. Without a strong central character the focus seems somewhat diffused, and the range of acting styles doesn't quite mesh. But all in all, the issues raised are quite challenging, and Herzog's funky style of putting a film together is always fun to watch. He literally takes you to a different world in his films and this one is no exception.

—Sean Axmaker

NOW SHOWING

Emerald Forest: A man searches the jungle for his lost son. Based on a true story. Cinema World (342-6536).

Fletch: Comedy. Chevy Chase is a newspaper reporter who assumes many and varied disguises to get the story. Mayflower (345-1022).

Goonies: Steven Spielberg produced this exciting adventure for young adults about a group of kids searching for treasure who must outwit the bandits and bank robbers to reach the climactic happy ending. Shot in Astoria, OR. Directed by Ric Donner (*Omen*, *Superman*). Shows at the McDonald (344-4343).

Gotcha: A young American goes to Paris and falls in love with a girl who is supposed to be European but turns out to be American. Stolen secrets get misplaced and the poor innocent guy gets trouble he doesn't deserve. Linda Fiorentino (*Vision Quest*) co-stars with Anthony Edwards (*Revenge of the Nerds*). With *Police Academy 2* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

Lifeforce: Science-fiction ghouls on the loose. Directed by Tobe Hooper (*Polltergeist*). Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Mask: Cher is the perfect biker mama in this "Elephant Man" (true-life) story about a teenage boy with a horribly disfigured face. Newcomer Eric Stoltz (*The Wild Life*) is sensitive and poignant as the misfit whose mother's love gives him the courage to live. Cher is tough and funny and sweet. The bikers give the film its comic relief, and provide a support community of misfits in which Mom and son live, work and play. Shows with *All of Me*. Oakway (342-5351).

Pale Rider: Clint Eastwood rides again. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Pinnocchio: Disney's animated classic about a carpenter, a whale and a home-made boy with a very interesting nose. Plays with *Return to Oz* at Cinema World (342-6536).

Police Academy 2: Their First Assignment. Cop comedy. A punk gang terrorizes the precinct, and inept rookies foul the rescue attempt. Shows with *Gotcha*. Fine Arts (747-2201).

Prizzi's Honor: Mobster hit man Jack Nicholson marries a beautiful woman (Kathleen Turner, *Romancing the Stone*) who turns out to be a bona fide hit woman herself. Should be intense. John Huston directs. Cinema World (342-6536).

Rambo—First Blood Part II: If you liked *Code of Silence*, you'll love *Rambo*. This film picks up where *First Blood* left off—that is, with Sylvester Stallone in prison for shooting apart a whole town. The government hires Rambo to go to Vietnam and get proof of POW's. West 11th (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Red Sonja: Arnold "Conan" Schwarzenegger and his trusty sword out to help his red-headed boss. West 11th (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Return to Oz: Dorothy goes back, makes new friends, and gets in trouble with an evil king (Nicol Williamson). Lots of music, but no songs this time around. With *Pinnocchio*. Cinema World (342-6536).

St. Elmo's Fire: Dramatic comedy. Too old to keep playing teenagers, Emilio Estevez (*Repo Man*, *The Breakfast Club*), Ally Sheedy (*Wargames*), Andrew McCarthy (*Heaven Help Us*) and friends turn into college grads. Cinema World (342-6536).

Sunday in the Country: Emotional conflicts within a wealthy early-century French family. Bertrand Tavernier won Best Director award for this work at Cannes in 1984. Bijou (686-2458).

A View to a Kill: James Bond (Roger Moore) engages in mortal battle with a psychotic industrialist (Christopher Walken, *Brainstorm*) and Villainess Grace Jones to save Silicon Valley from being captured, blown-up and GASP! tumbled into the ocean. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Where the Green Ants Dream: Filmed in Australia by West German director Werner Herzog (*Nosferatu*, *Fitzcarraldo*). Aborigines struggle in vain to save their culture from the "white man's" mining company. Their sacred land is cursed with rich uranium deposits. At Cinema 7 (687-0733).
—Michael Sussman

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New York Times
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