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CINEMA

The Clinic

Directed by David Steven; screenplay by Greg Millin; with Chris Haywood, Simon Burke, Gerda Nicholson.

There are many theories of humor. One of the more prominent of these explains laughter as a release of tension. When a human being recognizes a stressful situation, such as danger, pain, or love, there may be a build-up in psychological energy. If the situation happens to be one of embarrassment, then a very effective way to discharge this energy is by laughing.

In this country, a reliable source of embarrassment has been the public exposure of sexual problems, organs, or language. This may be less so for the exposer than for witnesses to the event.

Given the credibility of the stated theory, and the precedents of sexually-caused embarrassment, *The Clinic* should be a very funny, if monotonous, movie. As a very frank attempt at comedy, the film includes plenty of light remarks concerning genitals, venereal disease, and lovers' problems. Obscenities are used as a matter of course, regardless of emotional context, and the candid photography includes several handfuls of penises. Nevertheless, I did not find the movie amusing.

The Clinic shows most of a day in a sex clinic in a working class area of Australia. The staff people

are sincerely devoted to their jobs. They are overworked, however, by a fairly constant stream of stereotypes who are remarkably ignorant, and sometimes boorish or stupid as well. The film does not follow much plot. Instead it hops from room to room within the clinic, following at intervals the progress of staff and patients. There are only a couple of diversions from this setting, and although the changes in scenery are welcome, they prove hardly necessary to the film.

REVIEW

It is possible that the movie's lack of humor could have found compensation in strong characterization. Unfortunately, director David Steven was burdened with such a large cast that this may not have been attainable. Over a dozen patients are treated by the clinic's four or five doctors, a counselor, and a medical student. There are also the support staff, patients' friends, and a small bomb squad. The characters that do appear on screen for the duration of the film at least have the chance to show us who they are and how they feel. Of the others, some are simply shallow men contributing to a running gag about gonorrhoea. Indeed, part of the film seems little more than a parade of schmucks.

The Clinic has better moments when it is not trying so hard to be

funny. In their own company, the staff people act more naturally and with more humor. They can laugh with and console each other without detriment to their patients or to their profession. Also, the counselor and the student each have serious problems to deal with. With more screen time, and more talent, these could have been very effective episodes. As is, they are treated with sincerity, yet seem somehow out of place in this unworkable comedy.

Perhaps the movie's best side is its honesty toward the profession. It is as if the screenplay were written by someone in the sexual health field. The problems faced by the workers are certainly plausible. The medical information given out seems accurate and worthy. While some of the patients are sexist, the film is not. When the lead character happens to disclose that he is gay, it affects nothing but the attitude of the medical student. What could have been a vulgar or shameful film is merely petty and trite.

All theories of humor aside, there are those who will laugh with this film. Although too crude for my taste, the jokes are plentiful. If you can follow the Australian accent better than I could, better yet. And if you find talk of psychological energy and discharge petty and trite, this film may be for you. Forget the theories, in that case. Laughter is real.

—Michael Sussman

NOW showing



The Bijou Theatre celebrates the tenth anniversary of the Rocky Horror Picture Show's London premiere, on Friday and Saturday, Aug. 23-24.

Back to the Future: A boy trips back to the past, and meets the teenagers who'll become his parents. West 11th (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Black Cauldron: Sword and sorcery stuff from Disney's animation studio. It's been a long time. West 11th (342-4142).

The Bride: Dr. Frankenstein creates a mate for his monster, then wants her affections for himself. Sting is Doc. Jennifer Beals plays the lovely bride. With *Fright Night*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Clinic: An irksome day in the life of an Australian sex clinic. Mostly, the lighter side of social disease. At the Bijou (686-2458).

Cocoon: Old people become young again through contact with benevolent aliens. Stars Maureen Stapleton (*Reds*), Hume Cronyn (*World According to Garp*), Don Ameche and Jessica Tandy. Directed by Ron Howard (*Splash*). Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Emerald Forest: Cultures collide as a man searches the Amazon jungle for his long lost son. Based on a true story. Directed by John Boorman (*Excalibur*, *Deliverance*). With *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. Mayflower (345-1022).

E.T.: Steve Spielberg's lovable, mega-money-making alien finds a temporary home in suburban America. At the Oakway (342-5351).

Fletch: Comedy. Chevy Chase is a newspaper reporter who assumes many and varied disguises to get the story. With *Summer Rental*. Cinema World (342-6536).

Fright Night: Roddy McDowall goes hunting for a vampire, in case you haven't had enough. With *The Bride*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Ghost Busters: Parapsychologists Bill Murray, Dan Akroyd and Rick Moranis capture ghosts to keep New York City safe. At McDonald (344-4343).

Lifeforce: Science-fiction ghouls on the loose. Directed by Tobe Hooper (*Polltergeist*). With *Rambo—First Blood Part II*. Fine Arts (747-2201).

Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome: This is Mel Gibson's third fling as Australia's postapocalyptic hero. Eternal rock star Tina Turner provides the challenge. Be ready for lots of violent action. With *Emerald Forest*. Mayflower (345-1022).

National Lampoon's European Vacation: Chevy Chase takes his family for another trip. Sequel to *Vacation*. With *Weird Science*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Pee-wee's Big Adventure: TV nerd Pee-wee Herman stumbles onto the silver screen, where he's out to recover stolen goods. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

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. With *Lifeforce* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

Real Genius: A brilliant college prankster gets even with a nasty professor. A mind is a terrible thing to waste. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Return of the Living Dead: Punk rockers rise from the grave. Guess they couldn't rest with that soundtrack playing. West 11th (342-4142).

The Rocky Horror Picture Show: The King of the kinky cult musicals plays Eugene for the umpteenth time. Late show through Saturday at the Bijou (686-2458).

Silverado: A real Western, for Pete's sake, with touches of humor and tenderness. Written and directed by Lawrence Kasdan (*The Big Chill*), and featuring a fine cast. At Cinema World (342-6536).

Summer Rental: John Candy and family have a stressful vacation at the beach. With *Fletch*. Cinema World (342-6536).

Teen Wolf: Hair-raising hormones turn Michael J. Fox (*Back to the Future*) from high school wimp to basketball hero. Cinema World (342-6536).

Volunteers: Tom Hanks and John Candy, Hollywood's busiest comic actors, escape to Thailand via the Peace Corps. Cinema World (342-6536).

Weird Science: The "perfect woman" is created by two teenage boys. Experts, I suppose. With *National Lampoon's European Vacation*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Year of the Dragon: Mystery and ultra-violence amidst New York City's oriental mafia. Director Michael Cimino (*The Deer Hunter*) is hoping for a comeback after his disastrous *Heaven's Gate*. National (344-3431).

Cinema 7 Film Festival

My First Wife: Australian award-winning drama of love and marriage. Plays August 23-27 at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Les Années 80 (The Eighties): An homage to the big bucks American musical, by an avant-garde Belgian filmmaker. Shows Aug. 28-29 with *Diary for My Children*. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Diary for My Children: An orphaned girl tries to start a new life in post-WWII Hungary, but childhood memories remain in conflict with the Stalinist regime. Plays Aug. 28-29 with *Les Années*. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

—Michael Sussman

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