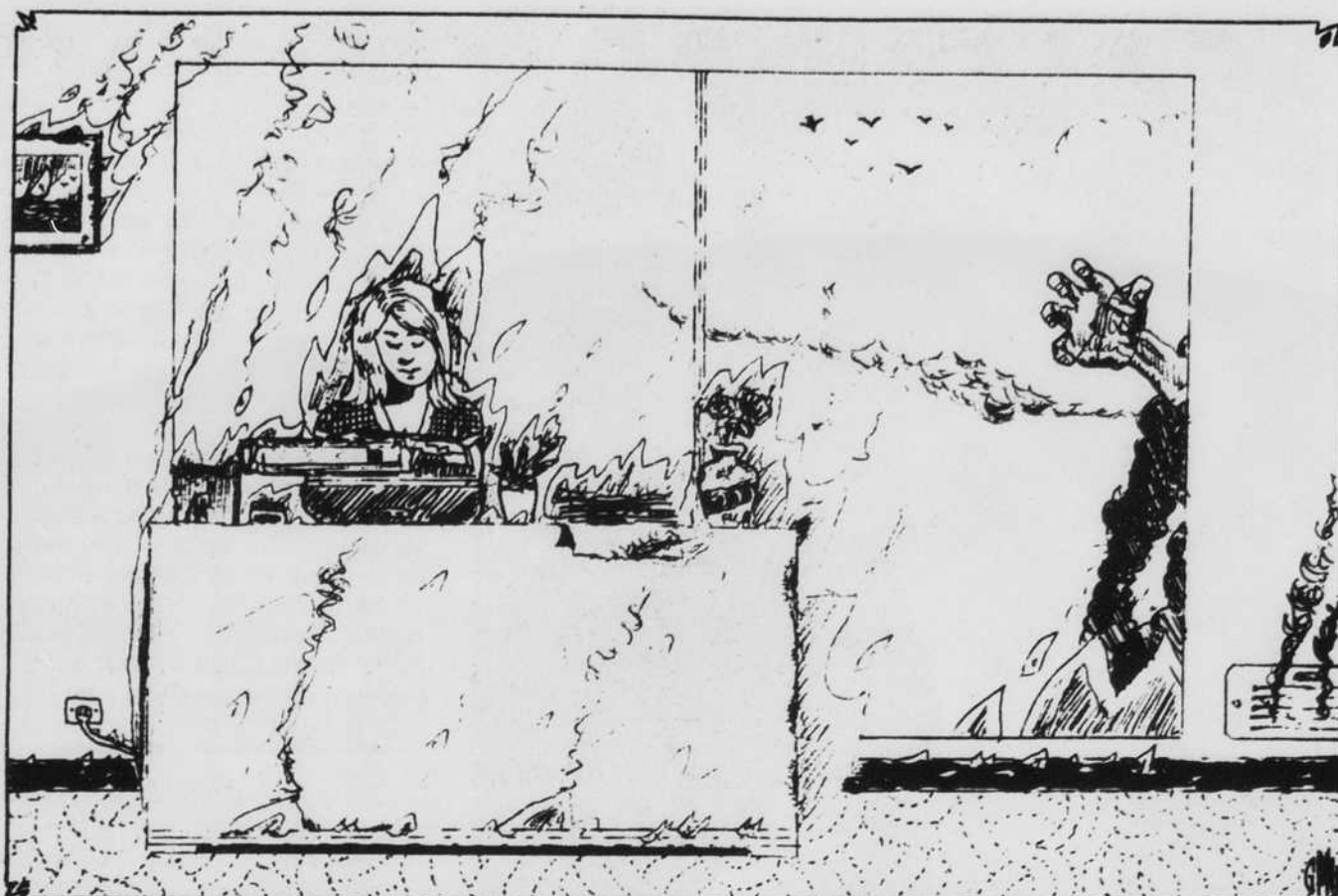


The Towering Inferno: 'A rotten



Drawing by Guy Michel

intellectually incompetent film'

By DAVID COURSEN

"The Towering Inferno," the \$12 million super-shlock epic, is neither one of the best films of the year, as one reviewer claims, nor, as I was warned, like a

three-hour "Dragnet" episode (Though Steve McQueen's zombie-like acting did remind me of the famous Joe Friday). It is, however, a rotten, intellectually incompetent film, so cynical and corrupt that for a time it seems to be inciting its audience against the

very qualities of greed and venality which motivated its makers. Among its more prominent flaws are inept staging, shoddy continuity, non-existent characterization, incompetent acting, lame dialogue and lack of a point of view.

For a while, "Inferno" seems to have a "Message," that quick-buck chasers are destroying the world, but, since these types made the film, this "idea" is quickly discarded. All the arch posturing about moral responsibility for the disaster seems to imply that corruption breeds destruction, but is actually included for no better reason than to convince us that the noble Paul Newman (designer of the building!) is as blameless for its collapse as we are. The depth of the film's sensibility is apparent in its most banal moment (which is saying quite a lot), when the appearance of a cuddly kitty (whose rescue appears to be O. J. Simpson's only function) is supposed to make us all feel warm and mushy inside.

There are also a few hints of potential political commentary, an evil-looking senator who flashes the Nixon "V" and a mayor's wife who looks uncannily like Martha Mitchell. This must have seemed too daring, though, since the senator virtually disappears, and the woman never even has a drink. All the villains are cowardly, ef-fete, wealthy, "immoral" and comfortably apolitical.

As for the players, Newman, trying to look like "Moses" Heston merely looks embarrassed; McQueen sought to but doesn't, and the rest of the cast wallows in mediocrity or worse. The film does have its moments, though. Early, we see Newman clean-shaven in a helicopter; minutes later he gets out sporting a healthy five o'clock shadow (perhaps "foreshadowing" the hair-raising experiences to come.) The fire, too, undergoes some quick changes. The overhead shots reveal an inferno as symmetrical as it is towering, with flames conveniently spaced at ten story intervals. Ground-level shots show just two fires in the whole building, one so small it isn't even an "inferno." \$12 million doesn't seem to buy much continuity these days.

Unfortunately for those looking for campy humor, the film never quite makes it as self-parody, though it does end on a note of self-awareness. This comes when Paul Newman, doubtless echoing the sentiments of someone in a post-production meeting, says, "I don't know, maybe they oughta leave it the way it is, as a monument to all the bullshit." They did and it is.

Prairie Fire to strike

Prairie Fire, a San Francisco area revolutionary music group, will perform at the University 8 p.m. Saturday in 150 Science.

The group writes songs about labor strikes and other struggles, and has played at labor rallies and demonstrations along the West Coast.

Rising Storm, a Tacoma group and Dan & Larry a ventriloquist act, will appear with Prairie Fire.

Tickets are \$2, available at the door. Child care will be provided.

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