

of censors. Most video disc pressing is done in Japan (Japanese pressing plants are like hospitals. Their American equivalents are generally more like slaughterhouses). Officials in the Land of the Rising Sun have refused to allow even such non-sexy fare as *First Monday in October*, *Serpico* and *Escape from Alcatraz* to be made. No such problem for tapes, which can be more crudely manufactured—it's estimated that half of all pre-recorded video tapes sold are pornographic. Or, as Zippy the Pinhead likes to say, pornographic. Pioneer is about to start pressing videodiscs at a plant in Carson, California, so America can soon choose whether to catch *Debbie Does Dallas* on platter or cassette.

The Tube

THE PAPER CHASE, which re-ran nicely on PBS last year, will reappear—on Showtime. Once again, we're being promised new episodes. We won't hold our breath, but we'll be eternally grateful.

FOUR-HOUR MINI series of *Little Gloria, Happy at Last* will appear

on NBC starring Bette Davis as Alice Gwynne Vanderbilt and Angela Lansbury as Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, grandmother and aunt of Gloria (now the jeans queen), who fought for custody of the little girl back in the Thirties.

Action Flicks

SEAN CONNERY is still promising to return to the screen as James Bond (and about time, whom does Roger Moore think he's kidding?) in *Warhead*; an original script, it will nevertheless hew closely to the original Fleming character.

THE ROAD WARRIOR (see Summer Movie Guide this issue) turns out to be the sequel to *Mad Max*, directed by Australian George Miller. The first of the two was said by some to be so action-packed "It made *Raiders of the Lost Ark* look like an Ingmar Bergman film." This gave rise to the rumor that Miller will direct *Raiders II* (he won't; Spielberg claims he'll do it), and to the unconfirmed rumor that Connery wants Miller to direct the above-mentioned *Warhead*.

Conan the Barbarian

starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sandahl Bergman, James Earl Jones, written by John Milius and Oliver Stone, directed by Milius.

The *Wind and the Lion*, also written and directed by John Milius, is one of my all-time favorite romantic adventures: when Sean Connery lifts Candice Bergen onto his horse and rides off with her, after vanquishing the threatening horde... heartstopping. There aren't many such images to fire female (or male) fantasies these days. And there are none in *Conan*.

Schwarzenegger looks perfect as the pulp heroic Sumerian hulk (he handles a sword with authority and his occasional sly smile betrays an intelligence behind the muscle), but there is no sense of the mythic about him, no suggestion of the fantastic. Even less about the others. Jones, as the evil Thulsa Doom, just stares into the camera intently, while Bergman (a nimble

sword wielder herself) has a startling American accent and vernacular. Nothing seems real, but there is no sense of otherworldliness either. The elaborate temples look phony, the battles are unconvincing (swords miss by inches), and the zillions of Doom's followers seem to pop out of the earth, existing on nothing in the middle of nowhere—just like the fancy defenses Conan constructs while waiting (a very long time) for Doom's army. Where did he get all those sticks, when there were no trees for miles? (I know it's a fantasy, but even Walt Disney would have given us a crumb to nibble, like "the wind brought us the sticks," or something equally silly but logical. I don't ask for much, but I do expect lip service to logic, however bizarre the logic.)

It's not that *Conan* is a waste of time, it's good, mindless, violent fun—but it has no challenge, no mystery. I expected Milius to give us at least two dimensions. Perhaps he'll do better with the promised sequel.

Judith Sims

Victor/Victoria

starring Julie Andrews, James Garner and Robert Preston, written by Blake Edwards, produced by Edwards and Tony Adams, directed by Edwards.

It is Paris, 1935. You can tell this because the shops and cafes have French names and the actors speak ze English with ze French accent. Victoria—a hard luck case who hasn't had a decent meal in days and who can't get a job in a cabaret even though she happens to sing exactly like Julie Andrews—finally lands employment in the guise of Victor, a Polish count whom everybody believes to be a female impersonator. Since Parisians—and especially gay Parisians—are very big on transvestites who sing like Julie Andrews and who look like Julie Andrews with a boy's haircut, Victor soon becomes the toast of the town.

Victor/Victoria's meteoric rise to fame and fortune comes at the hand of several remarkably implausible coin-

cidences: a chance encounter with a cockroach, a sudden rainstorm that shrinks Victoria's clothing half its size and the sudden brainstorm of a gay Good Samaritan named Toddy who happens to look and sing exactly like Robert Preston.

So enter King Marchan, a Chicago club owner/gangster-type who happens to look exactly like James Garner with a Clark Gable moustache. Of course, he falls head over heels for Victor/Victoria and is convinced that she's really a woman because there's no way he could fall in love with another (gulp) guy.

If all this sounds incredibly stupid, it is. Based on a 1933 German movie, *Viktor und Viktoria*, Blake Edwards' remake is an embarrassment. Even Edwards' flair for visual comedy, which he worked to near mastery with Peter Sellers in the Pink Panther films, is here almost nonexistent.

If your idea of a good time is to listen to an endless succession of very polite but not terribly amusing jokes about homosexuals and to watch countless table-throwing, cake-in-the-

face restaurant melees, then hurry off to see *Victor/Victoria*. Steven X. Rea

Cat People

starring Nastassia Kinski, Malcolm McDowell and John Heard, written by Alan Ormsby, directed by Paul Schrader.

In 1942, Val Lewton, a producer with very little money and a great deal of imagination, made *Cat People*, a B movie that has since gone on to cult status. Now *Cat People* is a remake, a costly remake, full of costly mistakes. While it's far more psychologically complex than its inspiration, this update defeats itself at every turn with muddled writing, pretentious direction and ludicrous plotting.

Director Paul Schrader (writer of *Taxi Driver* and *The Yakuza* and director of *American Gigolo*) ought to have been perfectly suited to the material. By his own admission he's fairly obsessed by Big Themes: God, moral-

ity, guilt, sex. *Cat People* is awash in notions of beast and man, salvation and lust, sex and animalism, but the movie doesn't so much grapple with these themes as paw through them.

The setting is New Orleans, and Nastassia Kinski plays an exotic young woman who is reunited after many years with her preacher brother (McDowell). Things are pretty weird right off, but Kinski doesn't seem concerned, not even after McDowell disappears for days on end without explanation. Kinski just trots off on a tour of the city. Naturally she's drawn to the zoo, and naturally she's drawn to the zoologist played by John Heard.

But love or sex isn't for McDowell and Kinski. It turns them into cats who must kill to become human again. In a ridiculous dream sequence that opens the movie, designed by Ferdinando Scarfotti (Schrader's collaborator on *American Gigolo*), we learn more than we ever wanted to know about the special relationship between leopards and humans.

*Cat People* has some startling images and an ending that's as haunting

as any in a horror film, but Schrader subverts the power of his material with bad storytelling. Ultimately horror films have to play into our dreams, and although Schrader's come up with three or four strong moments, he can't sustain the illusions.

The movie is also very bloody and contains some misguided special effects that seem left over from *An American Werewolf in London*. *Cat People* has been sadly declawed.

Jacoba Atlas

I Oughta Be in Pictures

starring Dinah Manoff, Walter Matthau, Ann-Margret, directed by Herbert Ross, written by Neil Simon.

Neil Simon does it again. And again. And again. Dinah Manoff plays Libby Tucker, a bright and irresistible teenager who travels all the way from New York to Los Angeles to visit the man she hates

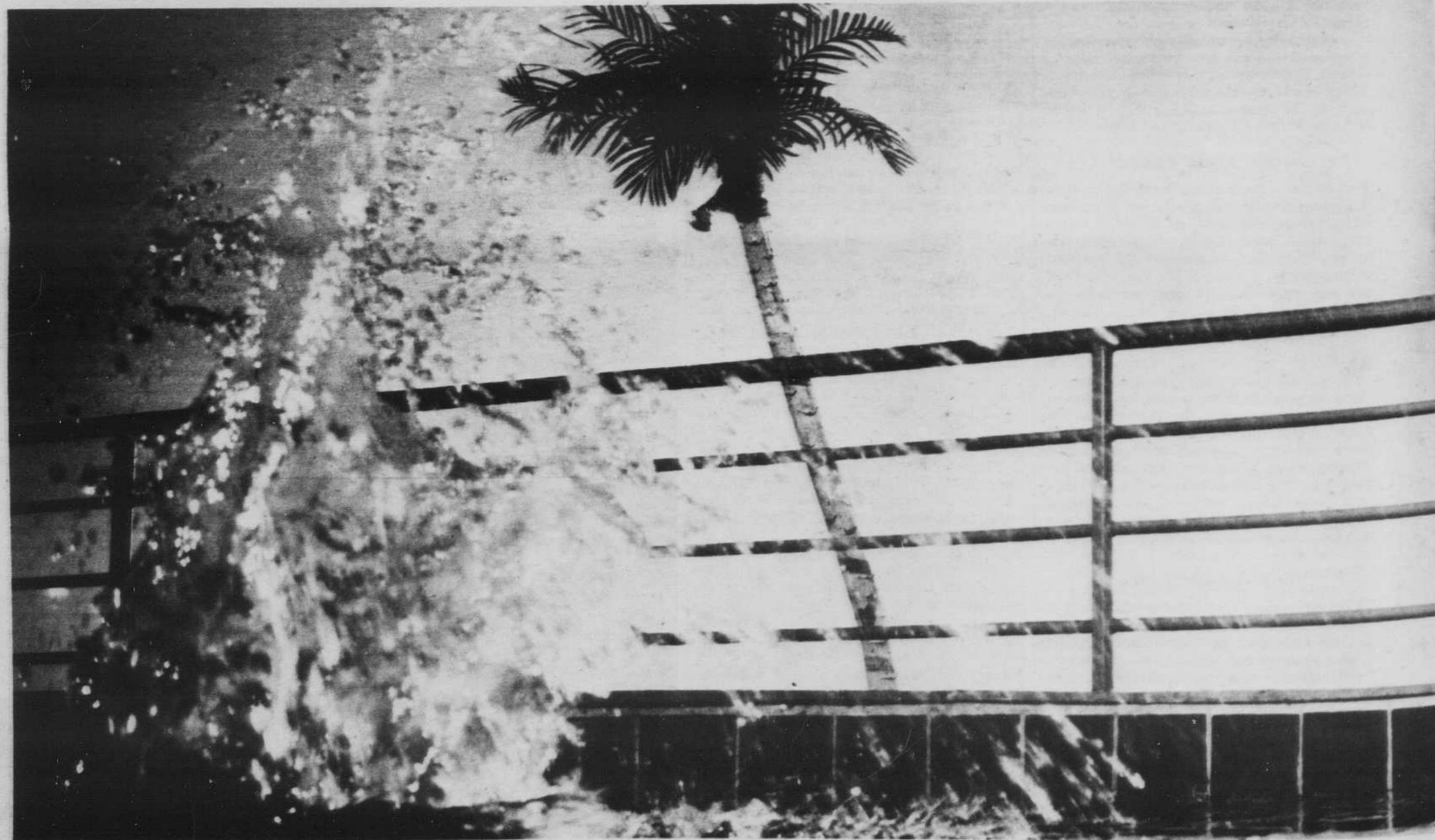
most: Walter Matthau as gruff and stubborn Herbie Tucker who can't have relationships, and would rather gamble his money at the races than his ideas at the studio. And Ann-Margret has big breasts.

Together, father and daughter fight and joke (he gruff, stubborn; she bright, irresistible) until he cries, she cries, they hug. Marsha Mason, I mean Ann-Margret, interrupts the feisty yet loving relationship by begging dumpy, grumpy Richard Dreyfuss, I mean Walter Matthau, to make a commitment. Simon's spontaneous repartee is not so spontaneous.

The formula works as most formulas do, but one becomes resistant to the coldness of this Broadway-put-on-film cardboard cutout. As a small film, *I Oughta Be in Pictures* could have been wonderful—it has nice visual tone and talented acting, but every nice scene has to end with a punchline, as if once the film gets good, we might forget who wrote it.

Who ought to be in pictures? I don't know. I only know who ought not to be.

Jody Eve Grant



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