

Two to miss: Supergirl and Missing In Action

by Eleanor Malin

Presuming, gentle reader, that you are one of the sensitive, literate, politically aware respondents to the *Just Out* demographics survey, you must be wondering why anyone would go see, much less review two dumb movies like this. I'm doing this for your own good. There's another whole world out there, and you should know about it.

In *Missing In Action*, Chuck Norris plays a Vietnam veteran and former P.O.W. who goes back to Vietnam, is accused of war crime by Vietnamese he had helped earlier, and decides to go after the MIA's he thinks are still there.

Supergirl portrays Superman's teen cousin, on a mission to earth via inner space. She zips to earth from underwater, having made most of the trip via space vehicle through a lovely light show, modestly averting her eyes. She is tracking a power source vital to her small community because her city will be destroyed without it.

Both movies display more similarities than differences. Missions involving social justice form the main plot formations. Costumes and gadgetry are important in both movies. *Supergirl*, of course, appears in the female version of the low profile — Clark Kent is a mild-mannered reporter in a gray suit — Linda Lee is a girl's school student in a dowdy, pleated uniform, with hair changing from blonde to brown. How wren-like. Faye Dunaway, as the archvillainess, and Brenda Vaccaro, as her sidekick, get to wear great costumes. The power object is just a revolving black and white spiral glass paperweight, pretty, but not very impressive.

Chuck Norris gets the costumes of a ninja, camouflage uniform, tweed jacket with suede patches, and muscle shirts. Not as flashy, but equally definitive of some popular young male role models as *Supergirl's* clear-cut, role-delineating costuming.

In *Missing In Action*, the story zips right along. We know the hero is our kind of macho guy as we see him smashing his TV set in frustration, being rude to everyone, and brusquely rejecting a glass so as to suck his beer out of a bottle. He approaches his mission with single-minded dedication. Since his mission is one of mercy, and he will be saving his pals, he takes this opportunity to kill all the Vietnamese in his pathway.

The fight scenes are brief, amounting to Norris vanquishing a series of small, inferior people, who are unable to neutralize him, even with the element of surprise on their Norris movie, since his karate is so much better than his acting.

Gadgetry featured consists of heavy-hard-ware booby traps, guns of devastating killing power and a well-tricked out, bullet-proof superboat.

Both movies depict all kinds of violence, but in *Supergirl*, it's not messy, whereas in *Missing In Action*, you feel like you should have brought a mop and pail. Many (too many for me) closeups and shots from every angle of men in hand-to-hand combat and bondage-and-discipline situations are used. In *Supergirl*, the two villainous women are done in, but it's by a monster — the materialization of Faye Dunaway's own greed, and we don't see how it's done. They just disappear.

In the action-packed climax in *Supergirl*, the heroine gets advice from her paramour (Hart Bochner), and her math teacher (Peter Cook). Did this magnificently endowed young superperson require their assistance from lack of experience, or was she just trying to make these guys feel good?

In the action-packed climax of *Missing In Action*, the fantasy is on an equal par with *Supergirl's*. Norris shoots, punches and kicks his way through a long and confusing chase and battle scene, on land and water. His success in bashing so many people (impossible!) is equally magical. These two movies are like gothic novels for the adolescent male and female. The action is a main element, but not especially articulate. As though these fantasies would be popular ones, but the young fantasizer might not have the expertise to imagine how such action would really happen.

In both movies, romantic relationships are downplayed as in *Supergirl*, or missing (no pun intended, as in *Missing In Action*). Hart Bochner, as the hunk love interest in *Supergirl*, is captured by Faye Dunaway, and *Supergirl* is smitten with him to the point of having difficulty concentrating. But the young couple never get past the most elementary of kisses and hugs. In *Missing In Action*, females are shown on the periphery, mostly as cheap prostitutes.

These movies are two sides of the adolescent coin, as extrapolated by middle-aged, male movie producers. As such, *Missing In Action* probably gets closer to hitting the target for the teenage male in its relentless presentation of adrenalin-provoking scenes.

In this, the country that gave you tea bags,

my main complaint is that *Missing In Action* is too convenient. The viewer doesn't have to do any work at all. As for *Supergirl*, nice light

show, the usual good special effects. No one will fault you, though, for passing up these two.

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