

Lots of Action

by Eleanor Malin

UTU

A real-life horror story, *Utū* is based on a true story of the Maori uprising in New Zealand. I loved this movie. It has action, suspense, humor, as much gore as many a gothic, superb acting. The Maori actors are perfection in their roles, which are all great roles. TeWheke, the Maori who organizes an uprising against the British, who have been pitting one tribe against another, is a real character, and his is one of the best movie roles for males this year. The New Zealand countryside, against which this savage, rather breathtaking story unfolds, is lushly beautiful. The scenes of the Maori warriors dancing, brief though they be, are worth the price of admission, alone.

Atla

This is also a true story, about an Athabaskan Indian in Alaska who faces a personal struggle. His knee joint surgically fused because of tuberculosis, George Atla returns home to his family after seven years away at a hospital. George didn't get assimilated, or even close, but by the same token, he now feels unfulfilled because he's been exposed to so many new ideas. But there's nothing to do at home but hunt or fish. George decides to try dog sledding, and badgers his father into letting him acquire some dogs.

He trades an old lead dog (sight unseen) to an old family friend, Moses Paul, played by Chief Dan George. Atla gets Jarvi, a dog with the perfect conformation, but, Paul says, no heart.

Atla races locally but loses, due to bad advice from another competitor.

One of his father's dogs goes lame, be-



Pius Savage portrays George Atla.

cause of George's mistake. Young George feels so bad about it, (besides generally feeling out of place), that he moves to a city to get work and try life on his own. He's lonely, and still feels unfulfilled. Moses Paul turns up and talks him into quitting and going trapping. But George still wants to dog race, so Moses sends him home to his father, George, Sr. who's the best dog man around. George goes home and starts to train. He's so good the local fur trader (Slim Pickens) fronts him the money to go the world championships. Out of nowhere, Atla, one bum leg but lots and lots of what it takes, races a thrilling and dramatically fulfilling world championship race. For a sports fan like me, this was a real

treat.

Performances by Pius Savage as George, Jr., and George Clutesi as George, Sr. are excellent. All the players were good. Chief Dan George as Moses Paul and Slim Pickens as Obie, the trader, put in their usual professional best in this, the last film they played in to be released.

There's so much in this simple story of survival, adaptation, shared enjoyments and personal definitions of achievement. The Indian characters are charming people with sharp wit and a refreshing point of view. The countryside is gorgeous and the glimpses of Indian technology were enlightening. The soundtrack features Buffy Sainte-Marie, and fits nicely. The soundtrack, as is the movie, is being distributed by Windham-Hill.

Best of all, this film is uplifting. It's the story of a champion who had to really reach to excel in his sport. Atla had to use his wits to outsmart wily competitors, push his body to the limits of its endurance, and get out of a seemingly hopeless situation by extraordinary means.

Invasion USA

In the most convenient of that new genre, the convenience movie, Chuck Norris carries a lot of big guns and stalks Richard Lynch, as Rostov, archvillain, who is trying to kill Norris,

due to unfinished business from a previous encounter. All over town Rostov's invasion army makes guerilla warfare on shopping centers, residential areas, grocery stores. Most of the time, Norris drives up just then, and messes up their plans.

A woman appears, coincidentally, at many of the same places, but this part was pruned back to offer the female role in vestigial form. I'm not carping here. Though this poor girl can't act her way out of a paper bag, I have come to realize that romance is not what is wanted in one of these action movies. Many of the persons in the audience will be very young boys, and it has occurred to me that getting impressionable males hooked on sex with their violence might not be the best thing, after all. It's mixing metaphors, to say the least.

Content in these movies has been scientifically directed by market researchers who measure the dilation of their subjects' pupils, among other responses. We have action-happy little boys, conditioned by Saturday morning cartoons, relaying to the scientists what they want to see, and then we get movie producers eager to package it and deliver. I say we deport them all! But, good news! The rest of us don't have to go to see any of these movies.

It's the same plot in all these potboilers. The government wants the hero for a special mission (he had been their best man, ever), but he says no. No. No.

The bad guys threaten, wound or humiliate him in some way he can't ignore. He goes after them on his own. He wins. Parts of *Invasion USA* and several other similar movies look just like old cowboy movies. The huge number of mercenaries shoot relentlessly at the hero (except now it's with ouzies), but only one bullet hits him, always on the upper arm. I think he needs that to unleash his primal powers. The hero shoots sparingly with his gun, even though it's also automatic, and he hits one, two, or three bad guys with each shot. Several cars or trucks blow up to smithereens, and much glass is broken. I can't in all good conscience recommend this movie (or *Commando* or *Remo* or *American Ninja* to any but the most avid action film fans, but for those of you who like this kind of thing, it really is efficient.

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