

Your government loves you, and wishes you well

by Eleanor Malin

A drunk wakes up one afternoon to news on the tube that there is trouble going on in El Salvador. He goes to a pay phone and begs for a press pass and passage to the fracas. He is a debauched and failed member of that battered branch of the third estate — the paramilitary paparazzi.

● CINEMA

James Woods plays real-life stringer, Richard Boyle (who co-authored the script) in the film *Salvador*. Shrunk, long down on his luck, Boyle operates, nevertheless by means of experience. Confrontational by nature, he asks everyone for favors, money. He doesn't get much, but he gets along. In one tight spot, his life is spared, and that of his friend, Doc (Jim Belushi, for comedy relief), because he once wrote a good story about an unpopular military man. But Boyle can't get much from the people he asks because they hold him in such low esteem. The inference is that he has been trivialized by the political hierarchy (of both sides), and the rest of the members of the information media because he dares to speak the truth. El Salvador in the raw is not the sort of reality we Americans want to deal with.

Woods is so compelling in his role as the sleazy stringer, you feel as if you are with him in his trials. The cumulative effect of the action shots and situations of terror and hysterical abandon absolutely will grip you. The characters are in a country where human rights count for nothing. The fate of the individual might well rest on the least significant detail — the whim of any dogface soldier or drunken partisan.

Boyle watches the other reporters having to swallow gigantic untruths to maintain their access to government types, and we sense he feels a moral superiority. Still, he acts like a jerk, and looks malnourished, as though he must be struggling very hard to keep himself from being dissolved in a barrel of Tick-Tack (*real* cheap booze). You feel sorry for this man; he's not a bad guy, really, just a hyper sleazeball in an impossible situation.

Because of his outspoken past work Boyle is *persona non grata* with US personnel, and can't even get a *cedula* for his girl friend. She could be killed if she gets in the way of a random sweep, just for not having the document. She could get one if she could get back to her hometown, but without it, she would most likely be killed on a trip home. So Boyle schemes to marry her, although he is already

married. When he tells his scheme to his friend, Cathy, a Catholic lay worker, she is shocked. A master of situational ethics, he tells her the marriage doesn't count, as his wife has left him.

At some point, Boyle does do a little reporting. He goes out on a death patrol with photographer (John Savage), another very good actor. Some really horrible scenes are revealed. We see what looks like a mountain of dead and mangled bodies. The newsmen photograph the dead to give to hospital personnel, so people whose loved ones are missing can go through them to look for the disappeared. Another time, Boyle is detained. As he argues energetically, no mention is made of a head sitting on a table. It's business as usual in El Salvador.

Boyle comes right out and says that Reagan was deploying troops and making moves in Central America before he was even inaugurated. He claims Reagan forces hired Salvadorans to rape and murder three nuns and Cathy, in order to drum up sympathy for their project. (I still remember the clip of Al Haig, squirming, explaining how if it was friends of the administration, it must have been an accident, and later, Walter Cronkite scoffing that this would surely be the first accidental rape and execution in history.)

Boyle gets to the site of the murders and sees Cathy, who's been partially decapitated by a shotgun blast. When he gets back to town, a yuppie reporter, played by Valerie Wildman, tells him that the perpetrators did the murders for some absurdly low sum and a bottle of Tick-Tack each. Then she tells him the Americans claim the nuns were Communist sympathizers and asks Boyle what he thinks. The look on his face says it all.

Grimy, slippery, unsanitary, this movie makes you want to go take a *long* bath. We see people struggle to survive, all sides become hysterical, death begets death. We see no sense to it at all. We see a lot of really fine acting. The urgency, the spectacle, the cutting loose from thought processes that must, of necessity accompany war-mongering — it's all there, and it's truly fascinating.

As Warrant Officer Ripley, Sigourney Weaver again makes an indelible statement for womanhood. Finally picked up, after 57 years of drifting in a deep sleep on the *Nostromo's* emergency shuttle, technically, she shouldn't have aged at all. But there are real-life wrinkles now around her mouth, and she looks older, which works wonderfully well, since it is the case that in her deep sleep, Ripley has gathered strength, and become even better.

But she's having nightmares. She's given a lowly job to pay back the Company, which blames her for the loss of the *Nostromo*, and would like to pin the deaths of the crew members on her, as well.

They interrogate her, refusing to accept her data, getting her to repeat the story, hoping she will make a mistake, or give up in exhaustion.

A company man tells her they have populated the planet where she first encountered the aliens. The crew was to work on an atmosphere production chamber, which they erected and maintained for 20 years. But radio communications from the site have ceased. Ripley is horrified. The company man asks her to go on a mission to investigate. She turns him down, but again, has nightmares. She calls him to ask how many people are involved in the disappearance. He tells her 60 or 70 — families. She says she will go.

When Ripley finds out the Doctor (Bishop) in the crew is an android, she is furious. The company man remembers that there "was some trouble" with the last android. That one had been programmed to assure the success of the mission (bringing back an alien for study and possible military application) even to the point of sacrificing all the crew members. Dirty.

At any rate, Ripley can do nothing about it. Another macho marine is in charge of the mission, under the supervisory eye of the company man, and between the mindless obedience and the blatant greed, the mission forges relentlessly on.

The company man gave the order for the little population to go to the caverns where the alien eggs were located, just before radio silence.

The landing party locates a survivor, a young girl, Newt. Severely traumatized, she eludes the crew. Ripley crawls through a little duct and captures Newt in a dirty hiding place, where she had apparently been surviving on junk food and adrenalin.

At one point, Ripley and Newt are menaced by the alien Queen. In a movie marked by good acting on all parts, this pantomime scene is the best.

As sequels go, much praise must be given here. Those in charge have followed the success pattern of the series of *Don Juan* books. That was the popular series wherein the old Yaqui Indian sorcerer proved definitively that a sociology student never outgrows nerdhood. The first one was a runaway hit, and the author proceeded to regroup the ideas and sell another, then regroup them again and sell another. *Alien* was not so much rewritten, as rearranged.

All the elements are intact. The old rusty tractors and copter parts may look more modern, but they are still worn and grubby. Jones appears in the beginning of the film, but is superseded later by Newt, the young innocent who must be rescued in the film's climax. The chamber with eggs in it is back as a really big, explosively treacherous chamber with lots of eggs and human cocoons in it. There's Ripley in her skivvies again, and just as she donned a space suit to vanquish the first alien, she dons a technologically marvelous "suit" to vanquish the Queen. There's even the same silly small talk at the dinner table. The treacherous "company" is there, but now personified by a scheming opportunist. And as we had terror and suspense in *Alien*, we have the same brand of *terror* and

suspense in *Aliens*. Just as the only change in the title is one added letter, you could say that it's the same great movie, only plural.

You take the high road, and I'll take your wallet

by W.C. McRae

Restless Natives, a film shot in Edinburgh and the Highlands, follows the antics of two young "underemployed" Scots who invent a unique but lucrative career by combining thievery and scenery. The pair decide to emulate Rob Roy, a Scottish outlaw who robbed from the medieval rich to give to the poor. However, in modern day Scotland the rich are American tourists who cross the hills and moors in buses, and the poor are, well, just about everyone else. The two young dandies use humor, ingenuity, a motorcycle, and a "puffer gun" which distributes curry powder into the eyes of the resistant, to gain their ends, but soon become tourist attractions in their own right: Americans are so taken by being robbed by *real* highwaymen, that they brandish their American Express cards in hopes of being thieved. Tourism in Scotland soars. However, the fun may be over, for Yanks and Scots alike, when law and order threatens in the form of a recently-robbed CIA agent.

The improbability of the film's premises doesn't detract from the strength of the comedy. While *Restless Natives* is heavy on whimsy, it is enacted before the more dire realities of Scottish life: unemployment, crime, and poverty.

The gratuity of the film's ending was studio enforced, explained producer Rick Stevenson at the film's opening — apparently, the idea that the youths might not be punished, however marginally, for their deeds rankled corporate tastes. Who needs the CIA when we have such high motion picture standards?

Stevenson sees *Restless Natives* as primarily a story of friendship. The central roles of Will and Ronnie, the two youths whose determination to win fame and fortune by fair means or foul makes them national heroes, are played by Vincent Friell and Joe Mullaney, Scottish television actors. The love interest, a fetching tour guide, is played by Terri Lally, another Scottish TV personality. Veteran American actor Ned Beatty plays the CIA agent caught up in the Scottish intrigue.

Twenty-four-year-old Edinburgh native Ninian Dunnett, wrote the script for *Restless Natives*, which won a Britain-wide writing contest. Filmmakers Stevenson, a native of Seattle, and Michael Hoffman, of Payette, Idaho, were post-graduate students together at Oxford University. After taking their degrees, they settled in Oxford and formed the Oxford Film Foundation. *Restless Natives* is the team's second film.

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