

Impressions of race relations vary in current films

The Gods Must Be Crazy

by Robert Lothian

"The Gods Must Be Crazy," a movie directed by South African Jamie Uys currently playing at the Movie House, is being billed as an "epic comedy of absurd proportions."

The film shows life in southern Africa where whites are not oppressors and sadistic killers, where Blacks hold down jobs on integrated newspapers and relate comfortably with whites. One might wonder whether the "absurdity" of this comedy might be appreciated by South African Blacks, should they even be able to see it.

In any case, the story revolves around the adventures of a Bushman from the Kalahari Desert of Botswana, one of South Africa's client states to the north which borders Black-ruled Angola and Zimbabwe.

N!xau, the Bushman, one of the last of a dying breed, is out hunting one day when a coke bottle dropped from an airplane lands nearby. The coke bottle becomes an object of wonder to the Bushman and his roving family, and they find many uses for it.

The film's best moments are contained in the scenes depicting the life of the graceful Bushmen. But the mood is shattered by a narration in formal English (which some might find patronizing to say the least) telling us that the Bushman must think the magical bottle a gift from the Gods. The Bushmen don't know who the Gods are, but we do — whites who ride in airplanes and throw out coke bottles. The theme of Gods as whites continues throughout.

Soon trouble develops. the Bushman children begin fighting over the bottle — we are shown several painful shots of them hitting each

Fiesta benefits El Salvador

A fiesta for the benefit of New El Salvador today will be held on Saturday, December 8, 1984 from 5:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight at St. Andrew Community Center, 806 Northeast Alberta Street, Portland.

The fiesta will offer dinner, wine and beer; a gift market with arts and crafts; and entertainment, including Spanish songs by Gail Highpine and Hector de la O. Music for dancing will be played by Manteca. A pinata and other entertainment will be available for children.

The public is invited to attend the fiesta. Proceeds will help to support a chicken cooperative in Chaletenango, sponsored by New El Salvador today (N.E.S.T.).

NATIONAL COUNCIL

The National Council for Negro Association founder's program will be held on Sunday, December 2, 1984 at 3:00 p.m. at Hughes Memorial Church, 111 N.E. Failing.

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other with it. A subtle message that "civilization" should be left to the whites, and that Blacks would be better off with their pastoral life in the Bush? Subtle on film, but everyday reality in South Africa.

N!xau sets off for the end of the earth to rid the Bushmen of the now troublesome cattle. On his trek, he comes in contact with a white nerd of a microbiologist and his white teacher girlfriend from South Africa. They help capture a Black communist guerrilla troop that has kidnapped a classroom full of schoolchildren.

The guerrilla leader had tried to take over the government of a fictional Black-ruled state to the north. We are shown offensive scenes of Blacks acting like keystone cops and shooting each other. A patently South African message that Blacks in Angola or Zimbabwe can't rule themselves? One does not have to leap very far to make such a connection. Possibly the most offensive aspect of the film at this point was the laughter coming from the mainly white audience, as Blacks on the screen get caught in doorways and do violence to each other.

Needless to say, the whites liberate the helpless school children from the clutches of communism, and N!xau makes it to the end of the earth, a huge cliff in South Africa, to throw away the coke bottle.

"The Gods Must Be Crazy" holds out an image of southern Africa where Blacks and whites live in harmony and even have fun together. To



N!xau the Bushman throws Coke bottle from a cliff into the sea off South Africa in a scene from "The Gods Must Be Crazy."

give the director the benefit of the doubt, one might ask whether he might be trying to do what he can within the censorship to promote racial harmony. On the other hand, "The Gods Must Be Crazy" could be

another extravagant public relations gimmick ala Sun City that promotes the myth of racial harmony in South Africa, a myth that no matter how hard it tries, cannot free itself from its subtle and not so subtle racist content.

Brother From Another Planet

by Robert Lothian

In director John Sayles' latest movie, "Brother From Another Planet," a Black man (played by Joe Morton) falls from the sky and lands within sight of the Statue of Liberty.

He's not a gift from the gods, but a fugitive slave from another planet.

Wandering the halls of the immigrant reception center at Ellis Island, he listens to the voices of the immigrants with his extra-sensory powers. From there, he moves off into the city on an odyssey which takes him through the streets and dramas of Harlem.

He finds refuge in a bar whose patrons think he is a crazy street person as he sits alone and trembling. He can't talk, but communicates where he's from with a thumb's-up sign. After he fixes a video game with his amazing electronic abilities, they adopt him, even though he is "a little weird."

As the bar's patrons talk we get a glimpse into their lives. One of the men is a caseworker who helps the brother by getting him a job fixing video machines. We follow them from the welfare office to the streets to the video arcade. After the brother fixes dozens of machines in the back room, a Puerto Rican coworker befriends him.

Wandering the streets, he comes across a teenager who died from an overdose, with the needle still sticking out of his arm. In a sensitive scene, the

brother pulls the needle out and plunges it into his own arm so he can experience what it was that caused the youngster's death. He walks high through the neighborhoods with a Rastafarian guide who raps to him of life on the street and offers him a huge joint, saying, "Take this, brother, and get on the boat to the promised land."

After coming down, the brother traces the dealer to his office high in a downtown tower. With his extra-sensory abilities, he causes the tycoon to experience an overdose, and then stuffs a pile of the white stuff into his face, presumably smothering him.

Later he has an affair with a beautiful nightclub singer being preyed upon by the club owner, whose picture he saw on a marquee.

Sayles himself plays one of the nerdy slavedrivers who want to rip off the brother. The welfare workers, his Puerto Rican coworker (who suddenly speaks only Spanish) and the men in the bar all galvanize to protect him from these wierdos.

When the slavedrivers eventually catch up with the brother, he runs, ending up on the street with a large group of Harlem Blacks from all walks of life. The sight of this formidable group is enough to send the slavedrivers running.

The film is wacky and comic, but what stands out is its sensitive portrayal of a man who can't talk, who is completely alone in a strange land, who learns about life on the street, is accepted and when the slavedrivers eventually come from their planet to get him, even defended by the people.

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