

DR WHO: THE MIND OF EVIL

Director: Timothy Combe. Writer: Don Houghton. CBS/Fox Video, released date 1/99. With: Jon Pertwee, Katy Manning, Roger Delgado, Nicholas Courtney, Pik-Sen Lim.

I have to admit that I don't think (from what little I've seen thus far) that the BBC's long-running DR. WHO series hit its stride until Tom Baker took the role in 1974. Certainly his prede-

cessor, Jon Pertwee, had a style and charm all his own, but the 1970 adventure "The Mind of Evil" only hints at that in a mediocre and overblown story. In this six-part tale, the Doctor and companion Jo Grant find themselves embroiled with two villains: the ever-aggravating Master (Delgado) and an alien brain the Master has brought with him encased in a machine that is to erase evil tendencies from hard-core criminals. Unfortunately, the beastie decides that it can get more to eat if it goes out on its own. There is also some subterfuge involving the Chinese delegate at the World Peace conference when he is murdered by his military advisor, who is under control of the Master, who plans to use the convicts at the prison where the mind wipe machine goes out of control to help him hijack a nerve gas missile in the hands of UNIT (the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce) to destroy the Peace Conference.

It all gets a bit convoluted, with the mind-controlled Chinese officer (Lim) leaving by the third episode so the good Doctor can focus on the hijacked missile and the Master's intruding alien mind muncher. As was often the case with DOCTOR WHO, the actors rise admirably above the show's back lot production values. The two story lines really don't fit together very well. Placed side by side, they seem like filler for each other to complete a six-part story that could have been told in four. Not being too familiar with Pertwee's episodes, Jo Grant seems hopelessly useless most of the time, not like Sarah Jane or Leela, who could usually hold their own against much of what was thrown at the Doctor.

"The Mind Of Evil" is strictly for the hardest and most curious of diehard DOCTOR WHO fans who might enjoy the historical curiosity of this black-and-white adventure that was originally shot in color. The only color footage, though, exists at the end of the tape, a replay from a scene early in the story that shows the Doctor's fine red coat, Pertwee's handsome silver hair, and Bessie's shiny yellow exterior. Fortunately, later stories have been salvaged in their original format and are available to all for better or worse. This one is a lesser adventure, a bit long in the tooth.

● 1/2 Frederick C. Szebin

INVASION EARTH

Directors: Patrick Lau (episodes 1-3) and Richard Laxton (episodes 4-6). Writer: Jed Mercurio. Aired on Sci Fi Channel 12/98. CBS/FOX Video release date: 1/99. 262 mins. With: Fred Ward, Maggie O'Neill, Phyllis Logan, Vincent Regan.

This sprawling, impressive, though not all together satisfying \$7.5 million mini series co-produced by BBC-Scotland and the Sci Fi Channel begins when Flight Lieutenant Chris Drake (Regan) disregards orders and shoots down a UFO. The survivor of the crash is Terrell, a WWII-era human who voluntarily went with the white-skinned aliens to learn their culture. What he



CBS/Fox Video continues to release episodes of the DR. WHO TV series. The most recent to make its bow on cassette, "The Mind of Evil," stars John Pertwee, the third Doctor.

learned is that a race called the NDs is systematically destroying every race it comes in contact with. Now, they have reached Earth. At the same time as Drake's air fight, scientist Dr. Amanda Tucker (O'Neill) picks up an unusual satellite transmission aimed into deep space. A formal investigation is launched by NATO-assigned U.S. Air Force officer Major General David Reece (Ward); and soon Drake, Tucker and Reece discover that they are all ND fodder in a subtle plan by the aliens to breed men out of the race, leaving women to become human cattle, breeding for the ND's purposes.

The cast is uniformly excellent, and handsome CGI gives the program an impressive scale, but Mercurio's script sabotages the effective moments of surprise, suspense and fear by being so frustratingly typical. As the series progresses, it gets slower, so that by episode five the ND invasion is progressing at a genuinely stately pace. Fortunately, the pace picks up in that episode's last 10 minutes and in episode six, when the ND's make their move. Characters act as exposition experts, telling us what's going on in snatches of dialogue that seem more like wild guesses, and Drake becomes an alien expert merely by being the one who shot the first one down, and no matter how many boners this character pulls he still remains a close member of the team, a military improbability. The script is full of such holes, like letting Tucker continue secret experiments on her own after being infected by ND DNA and showing signs of becoming more like them! There is a satisfying down-beat ending, and exciting moments throughout, but it all could have been cut down to a possibly more effective two hours or so. As it stands, the effects are nice, Scotland is pretty, and alien invasions seem to be able to move as rapidly as continental plates.

● 1/2 Frederick C. Szebin

SPACE TRUCKERS

Director: Stuart Gordon. Writer: Ted Mann; story by Stuart Gordon and Ted Mann. Production Designer: Simon Murton. Special Effects Supervisors: Brian Johnson and Paul Gentry. Additional FX and Make Up by Greg Cannom. Optic Nerve, and Screaming Mad George. HBO-TV, 1/99. 100 mins. PG-13. With: Dennis Hopper, Stephen Dorff, Debi Mazar, Charles Dance, George Wendt, Barbara Crampton.

Although shot in a widescreen format in anticipation of a theatrical release, this independent production wound up making its debut on HBO-TV after failing to find a domestic distributor. Certainly no STAR WARS, this charming bit of camp still didn't deserve the obscurity of cable. It would have been a fun viewing experience on the big screen thanks to nice production design and effects. Space Trucker John Canyon (Hopper) hooks up with his fiancée (Mazar) and young jock Mike (Dorff) when they get into some trouble in a space bar after evil pork merchant George Wendt is sucked out a window butt first. To get off the station they accept a secret shipment that turns out to be the bio-mechanical Geiger-inspired super killing machines created by scientist Macanudo (Dance) who had his own creation turned against him and rebuilt himself into a cyborg space pirate with a crew that does everything pirates do, except say "Arrg!" Macanudo inadvertently releases the killer bots and the rest of the story has everyone trying to avoid them as they attack in ever increasing waves.

Little winks of the eye are given to STAR WARS, 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, ALIEN, BARBARELLA and even FLESH GORDON in an amusing bedroom scene between Mazar and Dance that seems dropped right out of that early 1970s softcore cult hit. The entire production is played light and for fun, and although it is never drop dead hilarious, SPACE TRUCKERS is an unchallenging bit of pulp puff to supply a smile on a rainy Saturday afternoon, or during a fit of insomnia.

●● 1/2 Frederick C. Szebin

TOM CLANCY'S NETFORCE

Director: Robert Lieberman. Writer: Lionel Chetwynd. ABC-TV 2/99. Four hours w/commercials. With: Scott Bacula, Joanna Colag, Kris Kristopherson, Brian Dennehy, Judge Reinhold, Xander Berkeley.

In the first half-hour of this over-long Internet thriller snooze-fest, Kris Kristopherson (he of the exceedingly dry delivery) makes a comment that it might have been better in the good old days when letters could be sent with good old fashioned postage stamps. Amen to that, brother. Because if this is any example of the type of "thriller" we can expect in the information age, then let's pull the plug now and stop wasting all that phone time.

In the year 2005, the FBI has created Netforce, a branch of law fighters independent of Hoover's brainchild that uses technology of the day to police the Internet. It seems that the Mafia has joined forces with their Chinese counterpart to do their dirty deeds over the phone lines, so of course Alex Michaels (Bacula) and his crack team led by Steven Day (Kristopherson) use everything in their futuristic arsenal, including E-warrants, video gun sights, and lots of keyboard time to make sure the net is safe for anyone wanting to download fake dirty pictures. So, there's a lot of airtime given to false leads, poor detective work, and plot twists that aren't all that twisty that lead to the door of Bill Gates-type Will Stiles (Reinhold), who wants to use his ingenious new web browser to corner the information market and rule the world or something with the help of a group of country-fied rednecks he broke out of a maximum security prison by using the—gasp!—Internet. Shows just how unsafe our immediate future is, I guess.

There is lots of dark, misty cinematography with plenty of the shadows and silhouettes that pass for visual style these days—or that at least try to cover the multitude sins created by inadequate budgets and shooting schedules. Actors staring concernedly at computer screens can be gripping entertainment, but only if the viewer has an emotional investment in gripping drama. NETFORCE doesn't have that. Director Lieberman keeps his camera moving, and all the actors do their best, but best-selling novelist and co-executive producer Clancy hasn't given them the material to bite into. The always good Dennehy is particularly wasted as country-fied Presidential aide spewing ridiculous animal-based homilies whenever he gets angry, which is in every scene given to him. Even a shorter running time couldn't have helped this techno-mush that purports that the destruction of the Internet would mean world calamity. A brief nuisance, perhaps, but maybe using the Net to launch missiles, terrorize hospitals and airlines and other such nastiness might have been more immediate, and certainly more interesting.

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