

HAWK The SLAYER

FILM REVIEW
by Alan Jones



Well, there is a sword, and there is a little bit of sorcery in *Hawk — The Slayer* but that doesn't mean that this cheap little film can be considered mainstream sword & sorcery, in the accepted sense of that phrase, at all. Director Terry Marcel and producer Harry Robertson's hurried entry in the sword & sorcery stakes looks like an old television episode of *Ivanhoe* or *Robin Hood* — *Hawk* is not so much a *Slayer* as a medieval *Lone Ranger*!

This film is a very big disappointment. I watched some of it being shot at Pine-wood studios last Spring and held out high hopes for it. Marcel and Robertson's enthusiasm for the project was infectious. They were convinced they could make a film on the scale of *Hawk* with a minimal budget. Marcel's description of the sword fights as being "something to top Spaghetti Westerns and Kung-Fu films", sounded really exciting. So what happened? Either the battles in the film were edited down to get an A certificate or they didn't really work in context because what is left of them in the film is very lacklustre indeed. And as to the allusion to Spaghetti Westerns, all there is in that department is a horrendous sub-Ennio Morricone disco score.

The story deals in basic Good and Evil and is the story of two brothers. *Hawk (John Terry)* is strong and destined for greatness and *Voltan (Jack Palance)*, hideously deformed and the practitioner of legendary cruelty. *Hawk* has sworn to avenge the murder of his father by *Voltan* and gets his chance when the Abbess of *Caddonbury (Annette Crosbie)* is abducted by *Voltan* and ransomed at a high price to the High Abbot (*Harry Andrews*). Gathering a band of trusty henchmen together, with the help of a witch (*Patricia Quinn*) he has saved from being burnt at the stake, *Hawk* sets out to rescue the Abbess and vanquish his brother. However he hasn't taken into account *Voltan's* jealous son *Drogo (Shane Briant)* and the double-crossing Sister *Monica (Cheryl Campbell)*.

Once past the point of *Hawk* gathering his motley crew together, all interest gets lost in a fairy tale where one swordfight

follows another with alarming swiftness and with little point, except to disguise the fact that there is no narrative thrust to the story. Hawk is a one line idea fleshed out in the extreme. There are attempts to inject some humour between the giant, Gort (*Bernard Bresslaw*) and the dwarf Baldin (*Peter O'Farrell*), but they are as misguided as they are unfunny. However it isn't this pantomime humour that finally sinks the film, it's the acting. There is the usual overacting by Jack Palance and the very bad acting of Bernard Bresslaw who must still think he's doing a Carry On movie. Then there is the non-acting of John Terry as Hawk! To be fair Terry told me he had little acting experience and he felt a bit out of his depth surrounded by the other professionals in the cast — but to have a vacuum where the all-important title role should be is a mistake of incalculable proportions. There is a sub-plot showing Voltan killing Hawk's fiancée, Elaine (*Catriona MacColl*) in a vague effort to make the audience sympathise with Hawk, but it just doesn't work.

While it's good to see a film that relies on cinematic and physical effects for a change, (as opposed to effects optically produced) Hawk only reinforces the theory that this sort of film cannot be made cheaply. The magic snowstorm, which was filmed using ping pong balls covered in a reflective tape looks exactly like a lot of ping pong balls covered in reflective tape.

Terry Marcel sees Hawk as "the James Bond of the '80's" and has a series of sequels based around the saga of the mind sword in preparation. Well, good luck to him and to the proposed sequel Hawk — The Destroyer, but for the moment the only audience I can see liking Hawk is a Saturday morning matinee one. In the words of one of the more hysterical unintentionally funny lines contained in the film, "The Hunchback will have something to say about this." Or will he, like the rest of us, shrug it off to experience and wait for the real start of the sword & sorcery genre which will be next Christmas with *Dragonslayer*!

Hawk the Slayer (1980)

John Terry (as Hawk), Jack Palance (Voltan), Bernard Bresslaw (Gort), Ray Charleson (Crow), Peter O'Farrell (Baldin), Morgan Sheppard (Ranulf), Patricia Quinn (Woman), Cheryl Campbell (Elaine MacColl), Annette Crable (Alicia), Catriona MacColl (Elaine), Shane Briant (Drogo), Harry Andrews (High Abbott), Christopher Benjamin (Fitzwater), Roy Kinnear (Innocent), Patrick Magee (Priest), Fery Mayne (Old Man), Graham Stark (Barrow), Warren Clarke (Scow), Declan Mulholland (Bard), Derrick O'Connor (Jarl), Peter Sarsen (Black Wizard).

Directed by Terry Marcel, Screenplay by Terry Marcel and Harry Robertson, Music Harry Robertson, Director of Photography Paul Sarsen, Edited by Eric Boyd Perkins, Art Director Michael Redwood, Production Supervisor Denis Johnson, Jr, Master of Arms John Walker, Stunt Coordinator Eddie Stacey, Camera Operator Bob Kinsler, Special Effects by Effects Associates, Producer Harry Robertson, Executive Producer Bernard J. Kingdon, A Chip Production.

Time: 92 Mins. Cert: A



Opposite above: Jack Palance portrays Voltan, a man "whose cruel perversions know no earthly limit," it says here! Opposite below: John Terry as Hawk the Slayer.

Above: Hawk the Slayer and his band of henchmen, (left to right) Gort (Bernard Bresslaw), Ranulf (Morgan Sheppard), The Woman (Patricia Quinn), Hawk (John Terry), Baldin (Peter O'Farrell), and Crow (Ray Charleson). Right: Hawk and Elaine (Catriona MacColl), caught in one of the film's quieter moments. Below: The Final Showdown. Hawk puts an end to the villainy (and overacting) of Jack Palance as Voltan.

