

Campus Commentary

The campus commentary page gives the college community a chance to let their voices be heard. Submissions should be type, double-spaced, and limited to 500 words. Copy can be handed in at the Capital Times Office or placed in our mailbox in Room 216.

The Hanoi Hilton

The *Hanoi Hilton* is a belated valentine to the POWs of Vietnam. A valentine still largely undelivered. The American Legion, along with some other Vets groups, maintains that this Cannon production has been backdoored out of national distribution because of pressure from the Hollywood establishment. These groups allege that it is only because of "incorrect politics" that this film has not been made available to a wider viewing audience. I'm going to tell you up front--I think they may be correct.

Vietnamese captors ease off on the prisoners, the scenes degenerate into a series of vignettes reminiscent of *Stalag 17*.)

The most powerful scenes in the film are not those of physical torture by the Vietnamese though, but those relatively quiet scenes turning on the idea of betrayal. When the first American who is tortured breaks, he is devastated, not by the torture, but in finding out that he is the first to break. When the weak character portrayed by Paul La Mat gives the Vietnamese information, we

THE JADE EYE: MOVIE AND TELEVISION REVIEWS

By C. W. Heiser

Because this film is so bound up in politics, and in the politics of the Vietnam war, which for us here and now is still politics in the true emotional sense, I will go straight to the source and review *The Hanoi Hilton* using Matthew Arnold's three criteria for criticism. That is, and I paraphrase: 1. What is the artist trying to do? 2. How well does the artist succeed in doing it? 3. Does the work exhibit "high seriousness"? (Does it touch the human condition?) Embracing the politics, does the movie still work?

The Hanoi Hilton was produced, written and directed by Lionel Chetwynd. In this film, Chetwynd's obvious purpose is to show us the horror and degradation of American prisoners of war of the North Vietnamese. In Chetwynd's presentation, a major component of that degradation is the betrayal of the POWs by fellow countrymen.

One of the ways Chetwynd succeeds in showing us the horror of the POW experience is through the use of what I would call open-ended cinematography and editing. As we follow Michael Moriarty as a downed Navy pilot through years of imprisonment, we are never manipulated by an expected sense of ugliness. There are no dank corners--clean light exposes dirt. In the set-piece torture scene, the camera stays in one place, at mid-range, building up detail on horrible detail. There are no tricks to distract us from the pain we see. By using this clean middle distance throughout the film, Chetwynd gives us the intellectual latitude to put ourselves in the picture, while still feeling the pain. (This smooth editing technique breaks down in the last portion of the film. As the war winds down, and the

are aware that what he tells them is useless from a military standpoint. What is damning is that he gave the information of his own, relative, free will, without physical torture.

Unlike *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, or any number of Vietnam era movies, in *The Hanoi Hilton* the war is not used as a vehicle to argue larger, symbolic questions of good and evil. In *The Hanoi Hilton* evil is particularized. This is especially clear in the scenes based, not very loosely, on Jane Fonda's visit to the POWs in North Vietnam. These scenes, like most in the film, are underplayed, and thus gain power. (And this not pretty portrayal of Hank's daughter may be what it is that's keeping this movie out of distribution. This is my opinion. *Rambo* is a heck of a lot more jingoistic than this flick, by a long shot, and Sly, the draft-dodging hunk, hero to millions, has blank check in Hollywood.) This major Hollywood actress touring Vietnam is shown as a dupe, while the POWs are more interested in the fresh fruit placed by the North Vietnamese to indicate better conditions than there were.

Does the film work? Yes, although it does betray itself in the end. The final scene shows us the prisoners cheering and crying at the arrival of a U.S. military plane to transport them home. A more honest ending would have alluded to the neglect these prisoners received at their return.

In the next few months, *The Hanoi Hilton* will be available on home video. While not a great film, I do recommend it as decent adult entertainment. Because of the volatile nature of the theme, I urge you to see *The Hanoi Hilton* and form your own opinion.

Only The Shadow Knows

I read in a previous issue of the Capital Times that the Nursing Services Coordinator is trying to line up speakers to discuss AIDS on campus so as to educate everybody so that they will become smart and not catch it. I have a few things to say about the issue myself.

A good many people claim that AIDS is a punishment from God delivered upon those wicked people (homosexuals mostly) in the sinful cities as an example. I have my own views on the subject, which can wait for later.

If we were to drag in one physician per day, complete with coffee, doughnuts, and slides in vivid color, it would still have no real impression on the average student. I just happened to be in the neighborhood during the last lecture on the subject, and idly curious soul that I am, I walked in and listened. The speaker was very good, but didn't add much to what I already knew.

I did learn one thing, however, and that is the attitude others on campus have concerning the disease. A lady I know questioned the doctor closely, until she realized he was not going to tell her there is any way to have sex and not be certain one was safe from AIDS.

That is the real problem, for too many people are unwilling to give up a pleasant activity, even when faced with possible death. Here is the case as I see it. AIDS has an incubation period of anywhere from one to five years. A person may get it and give it to a staggering number of people within that time. If a person has AIDS he may not know about it and continue to transmit it to others. A "smart" lady these days asks her prospective partner if he has AIDS. How many people, faced with the possible rejection on a grand scale such an admission would cause them, would say "Yes" if asked?

The "smartest" people of all practice "safe sex." These are probably the same people who refinance their mortgages three and four times over. They use all the fun high-tech stuff, condoms, diaphragms, foams that remind one of the stuff that gets sprayed when a crippled 747 is about to hit the runway, creams, and other aids of dubious utility.

"Safe sex" is a myth. Balloons break, diaphragms only protect certain parts of the anatomy, and jumbo jets still burst into flames as they crash, even if the foam's been shoveled on too deep to walk in.

To be blunt, nothing is guaranteed to work. You may catch AIDS on even your first time out, and the fact remains that AIDS carries a death sentence. Think about it a minute, and you will see only one thing to do in the face of all this. Just don't have sex.

You may stop laughing now. But think about it. An hour's pleasure could take 50 years off your life. That sure beats the hell out of smoking, where one cigarette costs you only 15 minutes. So put your energy elsewhere! Chain-smoke, drink like a fiend, eat until you burst, go into sports or take up a hobby, or become a workaholic. Just don't go out and have sex, because guys are always looking to put another notch on their gun and the ladies have been known to step out.

Of course, if you like to step out too much yourself, there is the possibility that you might just watch your hair and teeth fall out as your weight drops to 70 and your skin becomes red Swiss cheese. I don't have to worry about that because I'm not going to get it..

And so far as those who do are concerned, I have a proverb that describes my feelings rather well.

The Devil claims his own.

The Shadow

(Editor's Note: The Shadow is a Penn State Harrisburg student who wishes to remain anonymous.)

