



## Exploitation Films: Hyperbole Gone Wild

By Kenneth Turan

Imagine the National Star headlining "Jackie and Cher Caught in Venus Love Nest." Imagine Kojak soliciting Bambi or Norman Mailer collaborating with Brenda Stone. Imagine it all and you'll have a hint of the excitement with which the film world awaits the modestly billed "Match of the Century," otherwise known as "Ilsa Meets Bruce Lee in the Devil's Triangle."

Well, perhaps not the entire film world, not those who cling to arty classics and foreign attractions. This film is for exploitation aficionados only, people who enjoy a class of film soe disapproving critic damned has "no discerning merit aside from the capability of being sensationalized." All the time.

Least of the low though they may seem, exploitation films are in reality the hearty backbone of motion pictures, the kind of attractions—"Chain Gang Women," "Face White Trash," "Macon County Line," etc.—that people just keep going to no matter what. And, like the now defunct B pictures of the '30s and '40s, they are an arena where discoveries can be made, where oddities, eccentric innovations and reliance on movie clichés are still the norm. Judging by title alone, "Ilsa Meets Bruce Lee in the Devil's Triangle" sounds like the very epitome of the genre, a jocular celebration of hyperbole gone wild.

Bruce Lee is certainly no stranger to this world. Quite bizarrely, ever since his death he has become a bigger star than ever, a King Phyllis Dean, and at the last Cannes Festival, almost a dozen films starring various Lee impersonations and built around little more than his name—"I Love You Bruce Lee," "We Miss You Bruce Lee," "The Killer Punch of Bruce Lee," etc.—were on the leading track. Never before, however, has he been matched with anyone quite like Ilsa.

Ilsa, for those not in the know, is all the Little Old Lady From Dubuque, in her debut, a 1974 film called "Ilsa She Wolf of the SS," she was a nasty temptress who lapped off heads left and right. And that was not her good days.

A high success in Belgium, of all places, where it broke house records set by "The Exorcist," that Ilsa film inspired a sequel, "Ilsa Baren Keeper of the Old Shalka," which is currently in release in 27 countries and is about to get a shot at Hong Kong. The future, it seems, is limitless.

"Ilsa," says Dyanne Thorne, who plays the role and should know, "is a very strong character. She is the whole cake, not just the icing. Ilsa go on her arm, not the other way around. She is a woman without love, a woman without humanity. Ilsa is multi-faceted."

Dyanne Thorne, curiously enough, is just the opposite. In fact, when she is not starring as Ilsa or making films like "Swing-Along Narders," "Swing-Along Barnabais" and "Christy Anderson, U.S. Navy," she works in Las Vegas as a practitioner of a positive-thinking sect called Religious Science International, giving "self-esteem workshops" and in general believing in "a positive, affirmative way of life."

"I love people," she says, passionately. "I have a love affair with life itself!"

In her films, however, things have been different. "I've made 22 and I've never gotten to live through one of them," she says, wistful. "It must be something in my karma."

Not much in Dyanne Thorne's background makes her seem a likely Ilsa. Raised in New Zealand, she has some very serious acting behind her, including work with Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg. She was a comedienne with Minsky's Burlesque Troupe and has had small parts in Broadway shows and major studio films, including "The President's Analyst," where the role was so small that when she "saw the film on TV the other night, I couldn't find my part!" Nothing, however, has created as much of a stir as Ilsa. "I've been mobbed at personal appearances," she says. "It's become a responsibility."

Though her husband (an actor-song writer named Howard Masters) originally didn't want her to get anywhere near Ilsa—"He threw the script against the wall, he was in a rage"—and though she herself "got a little

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ask," when she read the original screenplay, she says, "I felt I had to accept it. I was desperate. I didn't have any other job. I was trying to get her to read it with a friend of mine. One day she called me and said, 'Ilsa Meets Bruce Lee' was out."

The man behind the Ilsa expedition is John Dunning, producer of "Chain Gang Women," "Swing-Along Narders," "Swing-Along Barnabais" and "Christy Anderson, U.S. Navy." He says he has been in the film business for 12 years.

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