

The Big White and Me



DISCOURSE

with Bill Polonsky

The Big White DVD has finally reached the video stores in Whitehorse.

For those of you who have not heard of the movie (or, say, electricity), this was a film shot in The Yukon in March and April of 2004 and stars Robin Williams, Holly Hunter and Woody Harrelson.

At that time, the filming caused quite a buzz around town with star sightings surpassing sightings of Sasquatch and three-legged coyotes on Robert Service Way.

The film follows the story of Jack (Robin Williams) and his love for Margaret (Holly Hunter). Margaret has an off-again/on-again spell of Tourette syndrome; Jack's travel business has hit bottom, as no one wants to leave Alaska in the winter.

Jack stays positive. "I know things are going to turn around. I got this feeling. You just leave every thing up to me."

Suffice to say that it's your basic story of love, murder, fraud, hostage taking and general desecration of the dead that has been described as a black comedy or "Fargoesque", pointing to the 1996 Coen brothers' movie.

I think Fargo was a much darker film, not much of a comedy, but has heavily drawn characters that reveal their own ironic humour. The Big White, on the other hand, is a faster paced multi-caper story that allows the actors some good moments of physical comedy.

The script, written by Canadian Collin Friesen is a beautiful

example of characters driving the plot. It portrays disability in a sympathetic light and criminals as people too.

The filmmakers were able to capture the scenic beauty of the North without succumbing to a travelogue. The characters live in the North, dress as they would up here and night shots reveal deep landscape not just black background.

Like a traveling carnival, a film shoot hires locals to fill in as labourers, technical help and background extras.

Eric Epstein, cast as The Minister, was subjected to a blizzard of artificial snow, filmed on one of the few days that had no natural snowfall.

I first met Yukon artist Meshell Melvin on the set dressed as an Alaskan Highway Patrol Officer. I wonder what her hippy friends would think of that.

I took in the cattle call for background extras at the High Country Inn and got a call back to stand in and photo double for W. Earl Brown, who plays the character Jimbo, a reluctant murderer,



Local writer realizes his dream of appearing in a Hollywood movie.

the larger of two hapless villains.

A stand in is hired to "stand in" front of the camera before filming to block out the set for technical purposes so the primary actors can concentrate on their job of acting. Photo doubles are used for shots that don't call for the actors face to be seen. Both of these jobs speed up the process of filmmaking and allow the "star" to rehearse or have tea.

I also stood in for Woody Harrelson one day and have a very brief, very deep background shot as Harrelson's character near the end of the film.

Filmmaking is not all glamour. Dodging severe windburn on the White Pass was a game I invented. Watching my feet melt into place over long hours was a way to pass time.

I received a credit as utility stand-in and have less than 10 seconds in the final cut of the film.

Would I do it again? Hollywood, I await your call.

Bill Polonsky, talented stand-in, can be contacted at strangethingsdone@hotmail.com.

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