

SORCERER

Lisa Jane Persky June 2018

Sorcerer, the film William Friedkin made in homage to Henri Clouzot and his *Wages of Fear*, is a matchless validation of the concept of karmic comeuppance. It's a roller-coaster ride that skips the chain-lift to the peak because that's where it starts. Then we lose the brakes and spend the rest of the movie plummeting towards a hole in the earth.

We're witness to just enough of four discrete circumstances:

- A lone gunman with a silencer kills an unarmed man in a hotel room.
- A group of Palestinian terrorists bomb a bus outside the Damascus Gate.
- An upwardly mobile Frenchman is told he'll be arrested if he can't pay a titanic debt.
- A gang botches a robbery of a Catholic church's money-laundering operation.

A guy — *the* guy — involved in each of these crimes — Nilo, Kassem, Victor, Jackie — winds up in hiding in the world's most uninviting outpost: a village, somewhere in Latin America, dominated by an American oil company. We have no tender feelings for any of them.

In the midst of their odious bargaining and bribing of local police for their lives, new identities or soap, mercenaries blow the oil well, burning innocents and criminals alike, leaving the perpetual ball of fire one expects in Hell. Our lucky four, not yet fully integrated into the system, survive the explosion. The oil firm sends a company man to assess the degrees of damage and civil unrest. Determining the necessity of fighting fire with fire, he makes a trip to the corporation's stash of dynamite, stored, for safety, in a deteriorating shed a jungle or two away. Equally poor conditions inside have left the sticks as unstable as the populace.

Who will agree to fly it by plane or helicopter? No one. So, for the love and fear of energy Imperialism, not to mention 8K pesos, every man in town auditions for one of four spots as nitro driver. All but one of our international criminals wins a seat in the two trucks. The fourth murders his competitor FTW. Now we're picking up speed. The ensuing drive is filled with the dread and danger of transporting leaky nitro through godforsaken terrain in equally damnable juggernauts — subtly painted with the names *Lazaro* (for Lazarus) and *Sorcerer*. Tension and moisture ooze from the screen. The audience waits for the wheels to fall off.

There's no CGI, no rear screen projection, no trick photography. This undeniably thrilling stuff is made better by an ominous soundtrack by Tangerine Dream that stands alone as a great example of '70s electronic krautrock and the almost accidental casting of Scheider. He plays Jackie, a man with a boy's name — which hints at how he's wound up here. In the rare instance when the tidal wave of cynicism, betrayal and retribution recede we're reminded that not everyone in these worlds deserve what they get. Friedkin provokes empathy with micro-doses of tenderness toward indigenous people and particular women. They're thrown into the testosterone driven G-Force so we don't forget the civilizing one. We're made to care, but not too much. It's unsentimental.

When you wrap the ride, take it again and think about what it must have been like to build. The Sorcerer is fate, and it catches up to you.