

'White Hunter' proves Eastwood's ability

By Jeffrey Frey
Staff Reporter

In 1951 Peter Viertel accompanied director John Huston to Africa to work with him on the script of "The African Queen." Upon his return, Viertel sat down to record the experi-

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ence that he shared with Huston, fashioning the screenplay for "White Hunter, Black Heart" — a story that deals little with the making of "The African Queen" and instead takes an insightful look at one man's passion, arrogance and ignorance.

The setting of "White Hunter, Black Heart" is the early 1950s with scriptwriter Pete Verill (Jeff Fahey) narrating the beginning, describing eccentric filmmaker John Wilson (Clint Eastwood) as the two prepare to make a film on location in Africa: "John Wilson — a violent man, given to violent action. Some ascribed him wild and troubled life to his personal mania for self destruction. These generalizations always seemed inaccurate to me. That's why I had to write all this about John — a brilliant, screw-you-all-type filmmaker who continually violated all the unwritten laws of the motion picture business, yet had the magic, almost divine, ability to al-

ways land on his feet."

Wilson, a man accustomed to having his own way, lives his life with a sense of immediacy for his passions and with his sense of responsibility focused on those immediate goals. Wilson lives his life on a grand scale. He is a storyteller and practical joker, yet is very much a leader whose exploitative attitude works toward catching the moment and making it last.

While on location to shoot the film "The African Trader," Wilson's desire to hunt and kill a trophy elephant outweighs his desire to work on the film — a film that Wilson desperately needs to straighten out his personal financial difficulties. Only, money is of little interest to Wilson and his role as filmmaker is on a level of obsession and of need. It is this same attitude that will impassion Wilson during his African safari.

Wilson's professional life has been an ongoing battle with film studios and the producers who represent them. In the case of "The African Trader," it's producer Paul Landers (George Dzundza) and unit manager Ralph Lockhart (Alun Armstrong). Wilson is abrasive toward the two, while shying away from serious discussion concerning the movie. Yet his abilities are never questioned; he is a creative



Courtesy of Warner Bros.

Clint Eastwood, as director John Wilson, prepares to shoot a bull elephant on an African safari in "White Hunter, Black Heart."

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Thriller 'Misery' stays faithful to King's work

By John Payne
Senior Reporter

Most people acknowledge Stephen King as the master of modern horror. Movie adaptations of his novels, though, have had a disappointing track record. That could be because a lot of King's works — like "Maximum Overdrive" or "Pet Semetary" — really weren't strong enough to be made into good movies. "Misery" is the latest King novel to be turned into a screenplay, and the result, surprisingly, is one of the best psychological thrillers to come along since "The Shining." What's strange about its

success as a film is that the book it is derived from would appear to be the most difficult to transfer to the screen.

After all, much of "Misery," the book, deals solely with what's going inside the head of the main character, a fictitious romance novelist named Paul Sheldon. King spends entire chapters tagging along with Sheldon through his drug-induced delirium following a terrible car wreck that leaves him crippled. The story is clarified very slowly, and readers are left to deduce a great deal on their own.

The always reliable James Cann plays Sheldon, a writer who produces books of two kinds: "good ones and

best sellers." The best sellers have been a series of romance epics revolving around his most famous literary heroine, Misery Chastain.

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For years, Sheldon has traveled from his New York home to a tiny Colorado town to finish his novels. This year though, Sheldon has used the time to finish a "serious" novel about ghetto kids. His latest Misery novel, still in print, spelled an end to the title character. A bad business

move to be sure, but Sheldon is intent on being taken seriously.

With his finished manuscript in hand, Sheldon leaves his tavern feeling like a writer for the first time since he started doing romance novels. His exuberance, though, is short-lived. A fast-approaching snowstorm and winding mountain roads force his car off a cliff. His legs shattered and near death, Sheldon is found and nursed back to health by a homely farm woman named Annie Wilkes (Kathy Bates).

Annie, we find out, is Paul's "number one fan." She knows every sentence to every one of his books by

heart. She is a former nurse with an endless supply of pain killers. More importantly for Sheldon, she's also dangerously psychotic, and she's just picked up a copy of his new Misery novel.

"Misery" makes a few necessary changes in the storyline. Sheldon's addiction to the fictitious pain killer "novril" has been down-played considerably, and a few extra characters have been added. For the most part, though, it remains faithful to the book, and as was the case with "The Shining," this was a movie worth making.

"Misery" is playing at the Plaza 4 Theaters, 201 N 12th St.

'Grave' unearths writing insights

By Bryan Peterson
Staff Reporter

"Grumbles From the Grave"
Robert A. Heinlein
Del Rey Books

"The two major things which I am attacking are the two biggest, fattest sacred cows of all, the two that every writer is supposed to give at least lip service to: the implicit assumptions of our Western culture concerning religion and sex."

-Robert A. Heinlein, in a letter to his agent

Robert A. Heinlein, the dean of American science fiction, died in 1988 at the age of 81. His wife Virginia has edited his letters and released them as a posthumous book, something in which Heinlein expressed interest years prior to his death.

The bulk of "Grumbles From the Grave" comes from selected correspondence between Heinlein and his agent, Lurton Blassingame.

Other letters are included, as are editorial comments by Virginia and portions that were cut from two of Heinlein's early books.

The book traces the writing career of Heinlein as he began in the pulp magazines of the 1930s and 1940s, moved into the "slick" magazine market in the 1950s and began a string of juvenile books before writing some of the best-known adult science fiction novels.

Heinlein's career gathered four Hugo awards for science fiction, all awarded for later works. More than

anything, "Grumbles" reveals the process, joys and turmoils of writing sci-fi.

It will be of great interest to current Heinlein fans, but may be tedious for those unfamiliar with his work. Extensive reference is made to all his

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works, making this a poor choice for an introduction to Heinlein's work.

Even Heinlein fans may be pressed to wade through sections describing the Heinleins' extensive travels and the building of two of their houses.

The book's other sections are much more interesting and give much insight into Heinlein while tracing the development of his books.

"Stranger in a Strange Land" justifiably receives more attention than any of Heinlein's books. The idea of an orphaned "Man From Mars" originated with work on a 1949 short story.

Not until 1961 was the novel completed and finished, a task that brought Heinlein legions of new fans from within and without the sci-fi field, as well as one of his Hugo awards. The struggles over the book's ideas and characters are chronicled in detail in "Grumbles."

Heinlein comes across as a staunchly conservative or libertarian character with more than a few surprises.

At one point, he wrote about "this pacifist-internationalist-cum-clandestine-Communist drive to have us treat atomics and disarmament in exactly the fashion the Kremlin has tried to

get us to do."

The same Heinlein, in referring to "Stranger," wrote that he had "undertaken to criticize and examine disrespectfully the two untouchables: monotheism and monogamy."

For someone who organized fundraisers for Barry Goldwater, Heinlein did some surprising tangling with the morals of the day.

The included tales of Heinlein's wrangling with editors and publishers in his early years (including one "amateur Freudian" who sought phallic symbols in his juvenile books) reveal him to be a writer determined to present his ideas in his own way.

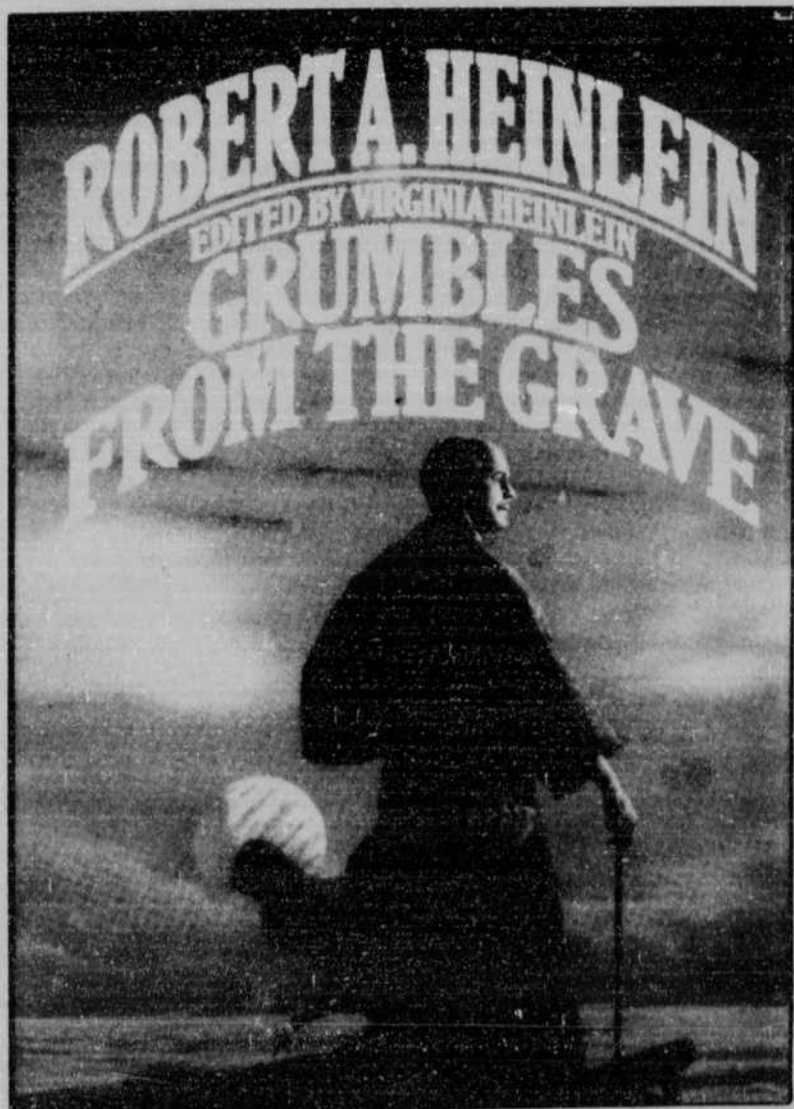
Heinlein was no struggling artist; he wrote sci-fi to make money (quite successfully) and says as much in "Grumbles." He made frequent minor changes in his drafts to satisfy editors but would not budge on the basic substance of his books.

"Grumbles" should be read as a blend of posthumous autobiography or a writer's tracing of the development of his own work through hundreds of letters.

Heinlein, who battled sickness for decades after contracting tuberculosis in the Navy, emerges as one of science fiction's strongest and most challenging writers.

"I was trying to shake the reader loose from some preconceptions and induce him to think for himself, along new and fresh lines. In consequence, each reader gets something different out of that book because he himself supplies the answers."

-Heinlein, referring to "Stranger in a Strange Land"



Courtesy of Del Rey