

February 29 & March 1: A BOY AND HIS DOG with director L.Q. JONES in person BOTH NIGHTS!

Contributed by Mr. Heck

Director L.Q. Jones' 1975 cult favorite is set in post-World War IV America, where one young scavenger named Vic (Don Johnson of "Miami Vice" and "Nash Bridges" fame, in a key early role) has an advantage on survival through the telepathic bond he has with his dog.

However, when they come across a mysterious female (Susanne Benton), their friendship and survival are threatened as Vic chooses to follow her underground, where old society has been preserved. Or has it? Based on a Nebula Award-winning novella by acclaimed author Harlan Ellison. Also starring Jason Robards, Alvy Moore and the voice of Tim McIntire.

I'll start with a warning. Yes, the 1975 film "A Boy and His Dog" stars Don Johnson, but it isn't what you think. Come to the movie looking for an extensive wardrobe of pastels or witty repartee with Cheech Marin, you'll be incredibly disappointed. Not once will you hear "Crockett's Theme" (though it will be playing in your head the whole time.) And throughout the entire film, he fails to don a blazer, let alone roll up the sleeves. It sounds like blasphemy, but stick with me. What you end up getting is so much better.

"A Boy and His Dog", directed by veteran actor L.Q. Jones, is a futuristic buddy movie which is both funny and horrifying (often at the same time.) Jones was daring enough to create a film in which the only really likable character is a dog, and the human characters range from pitifully single-minded (sorry Don) to despicably single-minded (pretty much everyone else in the film.) This would make for a difficult movie-going experience if it wasn't as quickly paced and laced with so much humor, both subtle and whatever the polar opposite of subtle is. Just don't forget that despite being so much fun, at the heart of the story there is a warning (and not that one about Don Johnson.) If civilization were to collapse, which it just might, this is how people may react. Not a good thing.

If you thought World War III was bad, you should see the aftermath of World War IV. The United States is a wasteland, and roving bands of hoodlums are roaming the desert in searching for love and something to eat. Well, not so much love as sex, and the other party's feelings on the subject is of no interest. This has forced women, the far more sensible of the species, into hiding. Enter our hero, Vic and his dog, Blood. Blood's sole purpose, in Vic's eyes, is to sniff out women in order to allow Vic to appease his most unsavory urges. Of course, Blood has an entirely different perception of things. He is on a quest to educate and enlighten Vic. Oh, I'm sorry, did I forget to mention that Blood (played to perfection by Tiger, one of the greatest dog actors to ever grace the silver screen) is psychic. Ever wonder what ever happened to Davie and Goliath? Well, now you know. Of course you always knew deep down inside, but never wanted to admit to yourself. But this isn't about you, and I'd appreciate it if you kept your emotional problems to yourself. As Vic continues on his aimless quest, he is being watched by a mysterious group who wants to use him for some higher purpose. This is where things get interesting…er.

Vic is lured underground by the beautiful and willing Quilla June (Susanne Benton.) He then foolishly, and against Blood's advice, goes with her to her underground community. Separated from his only companion, Vic is quickly taken prisoner. Once captured, he is brought to the most terrifying place imaginable: Underground Topeka! I'm assuming you've taken some time to let that sink in, so let's continue. One shock is followed quickly by another. The town is under the control of a ruthless committee whose leader is played by… Jason Robards! In completely unexplained clown make-up! Robards and company want to force Vic to impregnate all of the young women in town. Vic is initially enthusiastic, but when the process is more medical than kinky, he wants out. Fortunately, Quilla has other plans for him. Can they escape? Will they stage a coup and rule Topeka? Will Tubbs make a cameo? You'll just have to wait and see.

Still reading? Then the combined drawing power of Don Johnson, adorable psychic dogs, and serious actors appearing in ridiculously outlandish films has not convinced you to come and see this movie. Allow me to pile on more. "A Boy and His Dog" is the film that created a visual style that has become the default vision in our minds when we hear the term "post-apocalyptic".

Without this film's innovations "Mad Max" would not exist, and there would be no redeeming parts to Mel Gibson's career. The Movie is also notable for the fact that James Cagney wanted to come out of retirement to

voice the role of Blood. The filmmakers thought that Cagney's voice would be too distracting and rejected the idea. It's probably for the best. The fact that the director was able to live after that slight was a sign that Cagney was getting soft.

The film is based on a Harlan Ellison novella of the same name. If you're one of those people who needs to read the book first so you can walk out of the movie saying that the book was better, check out Ellison's story collection *The Beast that Shouted Love at the Heart of the World*. Notoriously protective of his work, Ellison was set to write the screenplay, but a case of writer's block led to director L.Q. Jones taking over. The producer of the film, Alvy Moore, was worried of Ellison's response to the film, but at the end of a screening, the author apparently walked up to the director and said simply "That's the story I wrote." The only major disagreement at the time was with the film's final line. Ellison claimed it was a "moronic, hateful chauvinist last line, which I despise." He preferred his own last line from his story, but L.Q. Jones didn't think it worked for a movie.

Ellison is not the only person who has a problem with the film's final line. The film is seen by many as being misogynistic. The director has said many times that he had no intention of making it that way, as he was just trying to be honest to the original story, which has come under similar criticism. Jones was about to go as far as to make a sequel called "A Girl and His Dog" starring a female character called Spike. Ellison expressed interest in writing the script, but the idea was eventually abandoned.

If I may editorialize for a moment, or longer depending on how quickly you read, the film's sexist label is not an entirely accurate one. The treatment of women in the film says far more about man's response to the fall of civilization than it does about the filmmaker's views of women. While the film may be cruel and harsh towards women, it is depicting a world where that is an everyday reality. In Vic's world, there is nothing amoral about what he does. Just because he is not judged harshly in the film does not mean that we as viewers cannot make up our own minds about the morality of the characters.

A shorter version of the argument would be that it's the seventies and everything from that decade needs to be taken with a shaker full of salt. The movie was made in the middle of the exploitation era and should be viewed, for better or worse, along with other films from the decade. Come to the movie and think about how relieved you are that Vietnam is finally over, or how furious you are that Nixon turned out to be a crook. Of course, you always knew he was, but didn't want to admit it…

About LQ Jones

L.Q. JONES - The Texas born actor Justus McQueen adopted the name of the character he portrayed in his first film, *Battle Cry* (1955). Jones, with his craggy, gaunt looks, appeared in many early character roles in war films including *The Young Lions* (1958), *The Naked and the Dead* (1958), *Hell Is for Heroes* (1962) and *Battle of the Coral Sea* (1959). His first of five roles in films by maverick director Sam Peckinpah was *Ride the High Country* (1962), followed by appearance with Charlton Heston in *Major Dundee* (1965), and then as one of the murderous bounty hunters in *The Wild Bunch* (1969), joined by his real-life friend Strother Martin. Peckinpah teamed Jones and Martin again in *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970), followed by one final Jones/Peckinpah film alliance in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* (1973). Two years later Jones directed the cult post-apocalyptic film *A Boy and His Dog* (1975). His character work has continued over the years in countless film and TV projects, including roles in Martin Scorsese's *Casino* (1995), *The Edge* (1997), *The Mask of Zorro* (1998), and Robert Altman's *A Prairie Home Companion* (2006).

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