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It’s cheesy, it’s sexy, it’s lovable…it’s horrible. It has sets made out of Fun Fur and more silliness than you can shake an $800 designer stick at. It’s the groovy 1968 Roger Vadim-directed sci-fi sex romp BARBARELLA, and if you haven’t seen it, I recommend you put on your best smoking jacket, shake a martini, kick back and enjoy the supersexy swinging saga that awaits.

The amount of love put into BARBARELLA, based on the popular French comics by Jean-Claude Forest, is undeniable. Every scene, set, costume and strand of hair is worked to death, and it shows. One can almost see the production swarming with overdramatic French and Italian artists, gesticulating madly, agonizing over every tiny detail at ridiculous length, from Barbarella’s underboob to the angle of a feather on one of the extras’ headpieces. It’s a big, campy, unapologetic serving of high silliness served on a silver platter, offered by a gaggle of stunned-looking ’60s babes with big eyelashes, huge hair and go-go boots. You raise an eyebrow, they hand you a warmed plexiglass spoon made by some temperamental Italian designer.

How can you refuse?

Our heroine, the titular future babe Barbarella, is played by a very young, hot Jane Fonda, and resembles a hybrid of a woman, a baby giraffe and a lost puppy (with impeccable hair and makeup); I myself wouldn’t be able to resist patting her on the head if I saw her before me. (Although I’m sure most hetero males would have different ideas…) She is a “five-star, double-rated astronavigationatrix.” And her quest is to save the pacifistic future from war, “restore the loving union of the universe” and get from point A to point B without getting molested more times than absolutely necessary or shot with a ray gun.

Her adventure is often accompanied by maddeningly perky, elevator-style lounge songs (by Bob Crewe and Charles Fox) that are one hair away from porn music. Moments of the orchestral score (by Michael Magne) are fantastic, but the songs are the epitome of ’60s cheese lounge, complete with some of the worst vocals, lyrics and arrangements ever heard by mankind. They bring to mind painfully tight pants, patchy sideburns, itchy sweaters and that guy at a party wearing rapist glasses and a huge medallion who says “Heeeey, baby, I can get you any pill you want.” By the time the enthusiastic chorus about “looking into the eyes of an angel” rolls around, you might begin to feel like maybe watching BARBARELLA is a bad idea. But then another set that looks like a giant plastic vagina comes into view, and you’ll quickly reconsider.

Fonda mesmerizes as she tumbles, a tousled, wide-eyed deer-in-the-headlights as she flies on the wings of love-powered angels, gets ferried across tundras on a sleigh pulled by a rubbery, smiling stingray and takes on foes such as whip-wielding leather men, psychotic vampire children (with perfect hair), evil goo and budgies. And she even manages to learn a little about “love” on the side. Actually, Barbarella learns about “love” a lot in this movie, from a variety of colorful characters: the aforementioned angel, a blind, hunky, brain-dead creature (not unlike Rocky in THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW) played by John Phillip Law; a hairy, child-wrangling iceman who’s all “Rawr…I’ma keep you warm with my awesome chest hair, Earth woman”; a sad-eyed freedom fighter in panties who wants “hand sex” on drugs; and even a predatory, knife-throwing bisexual queen, played by the smoking hot Anita Pallenberg but with Joan Greenwood’s sultry voice amusingly overdubbed.

This film really captures the vibe of the ’60s in a neat little package, complete with retro-futuristic shiny fabrics and lots of clear plastic. It even has a sequence with the iconic “lava lamp” effect in the background and Vidal Sassoon hair that looks like you could bounce quarters off it. For the small price of enduring some serious cheese, you’re transported to a magical realm where even in Sogo, the city of evil where “a new sin is created every minute,” you can’t help but smile at how innocent and squeaky-clean this “city of sin” is. All of Sogo’s denizens don that saucy, omnipresent undie/cape combo and act like they’re all cool and bad-ass. They pose and lean endlessly, gingerly holding fierce-looking weapons from within various compartments in their giant plastic vaginas.

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