

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Directed by Sergio Leone
Produced by Alberto Grimaldi
Distributed by United Artists
Released in 1967

A man looks past the camera, thinking. The wind kicks up the dust as a smile crosses his face. The music tells the rest.

Despite the title of the movie, nobody is good, but these three men of the West are, each one, daring, patient, cruel. The simple story of a lost cache of Confederate gold becomes a masterpiece of the genre by taking the risks an American western would not. It's a long movie, and there is no hero. There is no romance. Nor is there much dialogue. (Good thing, too 'cause with only a few actors speaking English, the spotty dubbing wears quickly.) Its simple ebb and flow of betrayal and revenge is livened by some very intriguing secondary characters, like Tuco's brother the priest, and the alcoholic Union officer. Also, the film is huge in scope, ranging across trackless desert to a prison camp, from abandoned towns to an army encampment a mile wide, and, finally, a graveyard waiting to exchange its booty for a fresh stiff.

The least likable of the characters, the greedy sadist Angel Eyes, learns of the missing gold when he's sent to kill a man at his home. The thought obsesses him from then on. Somehow he's managed the formidable trick of sidelining as a bounty hunter while soldiering in the Union Army. Meticulously he reconstructs what happened, less by deduction than by brute force. He moves in and out of the picture like a recurring nightmare.

The other two men are obligated to protect each other to ensure a chance at the gold. They never become friends, but are united by mutual respect. Tuco is a garrulous con who's had a hand in scores of petty crimes. He's perpetually foiled by bad luck but always manages to stay alive with some quick thinking and an even quicker gun. He, too, is obsessed by the gold, but at least makes us laugh.

Blondie is the one guy that keeps his head on straight. But that's just his nickname, according to the millions of fans this picture has captured. To them Clint Eastwood embodies The Man With No Name. He is the laconic drifter—dispassionate, sarcastic, just as much in control whether he's pointing a gun or facing one. What makes him Good is, perhaps, his kindness. Though seemingly incapable of sadness or empathy, Blondie is the only one to care for the dying men they run across through their adventures, and he is briefly seen petting a kitty!

The devastating impact of the triple shootout climax is the result of cumulative revelation. Much of the film is a series of semi-disassociated scenes contributing little to the narrative thrust of treasure hunting, while revealing a lot about character. When the end is at hand we know what they're capable of.

AN ILLUMINED ILLUSIONS ESSAY BY IAN C. BLOOM

And we know the full potential of the Western is still unmet. This film proves that any genre can be given a fresh start when great writing and inspired casting are entrusted to a director willing to take risks. *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* is a devious wonder.