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Dr. Anansa Linderby is kidnapped in a medical mission in Africa by a slave trader. From this moment, her husband will do anything to recover her and to punish the bad guys, but that will be not an easy task. Richard Fleischer was a very prolific director with a simple style but he was brave enough to enter films in all genres ("The Vikings", "Barabbas", "Compulsion", "Blind Terror", "The Boston Strangler", "Soylent Green", "Tora, Tora, Tora") with very good and acceptable results indeed.

With "Ashanti" he gets a watchable film and a sort of testimonial one dealing with slavery in the XX Century as a pretty female Doctor rendering services for the United Nations among primitive tribes in Africa is kidnapped to be sold in the eastern Arabian markets; her husband goes on a long pursuit of the slave traders to recover her. Shoot in jungle and desert wide-open outdoor locations the film is sort of slow at times but it also has some good moments.

An all star cast is a plus. Michael Caine renders an acceptable performance as the willing husband and model Beverly Johnson does too as his abducted wife. Peter Ustinov steals the show as the fiendish chief slave dealer Suleiman in what is probably the most interesting character in the film. Rex Harrison and William Holden not at the peak of their careers back then make correct appearances in small roles. Omar Shariff and Kabir Bedi are there too.

Not a great film at all but worth a watch in my opinion. It's a 6 out of 10 for me. At a first glance there is nothing wrong with anything in this picture, the story is excellent and of vital interest, the actors are on the whole prominent, no one does anything wrong, the music is also quite OK, and the scenery is magnificent, - but what then is missing? Michael Caine in the lead has called it the worst film he ever made, but there is nothing wrong with his acting, even though you can trace a slight lack of interest and passion, which is what he professes as the husband of the violated bride. Peter Ustinov makes the most of his character the villain, an abominable slave trader counting every human life as worthless unless he can sell it for money and even succeeds in making this monster of a human trafficker look ridiculous - it's actually a caricature. William Holden has the briefest but also the most interesting part, a role typical for him, in which he shines and develops a profound interest only to become the first and most regrettable casualty, like a typical Holden hero. Rex Harrison is as sly as always and also makes the best of his diplomatic business in doing what he can to temper and prepare Michael Caine for his quest, while the most fascinating figure is Kabir Bedi as Malik, a copy of Omar Sharif's Ali in "Lawrence of Arabia", who has another tragic and heroic story to tell - and ends as regretfully as William Holden. Omar Sharif is credible enough as Prince Hassan, and his eloquence and gentlemanly demeanor almost makes you hope for some humanity in him, but he absconds as soon as he sees that his game is up.

The actor left for us to dissect is Beverly Johnson as the leading lady, and here is the evident flaw. She is good in the beginning as the doctor and wife and even better as Peter Ustinov's bullied slave, but when it comes to the final critical point she loses everything, and suddenly you understand Michael Caine's lack of interest in her, although they married for love. which he insists on but which no one can believe, least of all William Holden. I am sorry, but she is not a good actress. If she had acted up to the part written for her, inspired Michael Caine to the passion needed to chase her all over Africa, and if she had been just anything more than only a cliché Ashanti beauty, the film would have been a success. One suspects that the director Franklin Schaffner, who has made a number of outstanding films, rather soon during the shooting noticed she was not enough for her part and lost interest himself, to finish the film just to fulfill the contract. Pity, because it's a great story.

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