

'Light' films score big, 'heavies' do well in 1979

By TOM MOORE

January, a rather dismal month with New Year's Day hangovers, income tax forms and a return to college after a much-too-brief vacation, does have some nice aspects. If you are an incurable film-junkie, like me, the nicest thing about January is the anniversary issue of *Variety*, the show business newspaper.

The thick anniversary issue of *Variety* always is full of information and trivia about the entertainment business. One of the most interesting features in the issue is the list of the films that made the most money during the past year.

During 1979, this being the age of the megabuck, super-hype movie, over 35 films grossed more than \$10 million in the United States and Canada in rental fees (the money the distributors take in, not the total ticket sales receipts).

The leading money-making movie in 1979 was *Superman*, which brought in \$81 million. *Every Which Way But Loose*, Clint Eastwood's feeble attempt at Burt Reynolds' style of comedy, was the second-biggest earner of the year at \$48 million. Clint was followed closely by *Rocky II*, Sylvester Stallone's remake of *Rocky* that was thinly disguised as a sequel; the boxing melodrama made \$43 million. *Alien*, a haunted-house drama set in outer space was fourth in the money-making race with \$40 million.

The Amityville Horror, a drama set in a haunted house, made \$35 million. Masses of Trekkies made *Star Trek* the sixth-biggest grosser in of the year, though it was only in release for three weeks in 1979. Spock and company earned a phenomenal \$35 million. James Bond continued to be a top

draw at the box office; *Moonraker* made \$33 million.

The cutesy *Muppet Movie* racked up \$32 million, *California Suite* netted \$29 million, and the Academy Award winner for best picture, *The Deer Hunter*, wound up with \$26 million.

Cinema

The list goes on with few surprises. What made the most money were light, escapist pictures backed by huge advertising campaigns that you couldn't evade if you read newspapers or magazines, watched TV or listened to the radio. And the

biggest money-earners weren't just entertainment items, they were events that anyone between the ages of 13 and 30 almost had to experience.

It's not surprising that *Superman* made \$81 million, but it is quite surprising and encouraging to look at the earnings of *Manhattan*, *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* in the United States and Canada. Depressing films like *Apocalypse* (\$23 million) and *The Deer Hunter* usually don't make bundles even when backed by ultra-hype advertising campaigns. Woody Allen's *Manhattan* went in for none of the media blitz that all of the other moneymakers of 1979 had, and it too dealt with life in unglossy, rather dismal terms, despite the romantic

Gershwin score and some very funny scenes. That *Manhattan* grossed \$17 million is a sure sign that there is a large audience for intelligent American pictures that don't rely on special effects and stupendous advertising campaigns to sucker rubes.

Maybe Hollywood will realize this and offer more pictures like *Manhattan* and fewer like the repulsive 1941. After all, it makes better sense to put \$3 million into *Manhattan* and make \$17 million than it does to risk \$30 million on 1941 and have it fall on its face with \$15 million in earnings.

Tom Moore is a staff writer for *The Daily Tar Heel*.



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is the feature magazine published each Thursday by *The Daily Tar Heel*.

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