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Guevara, Ernesto (Che)

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C.I.A. 3.03 Cuba

Cuban Caricature

Poor Che Guevara. Wasn't it enough that he died a failure in the boondocks of Bolivia trying to spread the Cuban revolution on infertile soil? Wasn't it enough that students the world over

have turned him into a pinup? Now Twentieth Century-Fox has hired that omnipresent Egyptian, Omar Sharif, and turned Che into CHEL. The cost in dollars was 5 million. And I hope Fox loses every penny of it.

Chances are they will drop a bundle, since the youth market at which this caricature biography aims will rightly sneer at director Richard Fleischer's galumphing attempt to substitute monkey glands for ideology. And people who believe that Castro and Guevara are modern avatars of Satan will hate the romantic sympathy the film hopes to evoke for its hero with shots of his corpse and its bullet holes.

Fleischer, the man who gave you "Dr. Dolittle," has, according to the official handout, filmed "Chel" "in documentary style" (that means there are feckless black-and-white fade-outs between sequences) and, by using so-called pro-



Sharif as Che: Galumphing

and-con eyewitnesses to narrate, has achieved an "objective story line." The result is objective, all right, objectively awful. Real history of an extremely complex nature, like the Cuban missile crisis, is reduced to an Al Capp confrontation between a worried Russian ambassador, an emasculated Fidel (Jack Palanco) and an idiotic Che who wants to steal the Russian missiles because they give Cuba "parity" with the Yankees.

Fleischer does provide some weird comic moments, though, like the split-screen sequence where on one side you see the dead Che's feet and, on the other, the boots of hundreds of marching *fidelistas*. That's really sophistication.

The only raw truth from life "Chel" does document is that major studios with major amounts of money can take the most controversial, jagged material, put it through the Panavision version of the Procrustean bed, and make it all come out "entertainment."