

## Majel Barrett as Whorehouse Madam in Westworld

Well, here's a tip of the hat tonight to Majel Barrett--whom I have long adored for her various works in *Star Trek* and other properties--and who I just now saw playing Miss Carrie, keeper of a cathouse in the 1973 sf classic, *Westworld*.

I'm re-watching this movie now because it is relevant to a work-in-progress novel I am poking at. As I do so, I am remembering that *Westworld* completely rocked my world when I first saw it. If you are unfamiliar with this movie, it was written and directed by Michael Crichton, and portrays a futuristic vacation resort where you can visit historically re-enacted periods: medieval, Roman, and the American Old West. A lot if not all of the locals are robots, though, and when things go wrong, the robots turn on the guests. Good times, right? Especially when we feature Yul Brynner in one of his most interesting roles, as the creepily unstoppable gunslinger who relentlessly stalks Richard Benjamin through *Westworld* and beyond.

In its way, this movie was a precursor to *Terminator* (unstoppable construct), *Stepford Wives* (who's real and who isn't?), *A.I.* (self-aware machines doing their own thing), and played a wonderful riff on our seemingly perennially deep-seated concerns about where automation and AI might take us. There is even an echo here from Crichton's 1971 blockbuster hit [Andromeda Strain](#), with the mention of the computer malfunctions operating like a contagious disease, and the intimation that assurances that "everything will be okay" is very, very far from the truth. In fact, people don't know how to stop this "disease," and the robot malfunctions come to feel both ominous and doom-ridden.

I saw this when it first came out and I have to tell you, at the time it really wowed. It was frightening and galvanizing and evocative and OH so wonderful for anyone who grew up with [Bonanza](#) and fervently wished to live in the real West back when. Very disturbing and thought-provoking movie.

It is also a treat to see a young James Brolin in one of his early iconic roles, and man, Josh did not fall far from the tree, indeed! Richard Benjamin is another story, so well known for his "sensitive guy" roles from the '60s onwards (married to the memorable Paula Prentiss, and with his own directing credits as well. I don't know if he is or isn't gay or bi -- there is much speculation about that in gay media sites even today - but he has always pegged my gaydar way over. When I look at him I see just a slightly straighter Freddy Mercury, but that's a whole 'nother subject). He is not as well remembered today as some other actors of his generation, but worth taking a look at. Especially if you are unfamiliar with *Westworld*, he is a convincing Everyman stuck in the "oh man I'm screwed now" role.

But back now to Majel.

So much of her work is associated with *Star Trek*, people don't remember or are unaware of all the other stuff she did. From appearances on single TV episodes in various shows (from *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* to *Bonanza* to *Babylon 5*), to appearances on things we now think of as

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classics (*The Lucy Show*; *Leave It To Beaver*) to a recurring role on the soap opera *General Hospital*, she showed up in a lot of unexpected places with unusual character roles. Even in the early '70s, women's lib notwithstanding, it was still unusual for an actress to embrace being cast as a madam. Miss Kitty in *Gunsmoke* (where her actual role was never explicitly stated), and Julie Christy in *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (a movie) were, up to that point, about the only women one had ever seen in such a role in a significant feature film or popular tv show. We all knew (and know) that madams existed but they didn't, shall we say, get much air time, whether in tv or film.

In any case, her appearance here is a a surprise, not only because it is another "hey! that's Majel Barrett!" moment, but because of the nature of the role. At one point she stands at the bar, blithely guzzling straight out of a bottle of whiskey. A bold statement, if there ever was one, for the brassy woman in cinema, and I can't think of anyone better to carry it off, even if it just amounts to a cameo appearance.

So here I offer a very belated "you go, girl!". Even if, in this movie, she is a robot. ;)

*Westworld*. Check it out if you can. It's interesting sci-fi. And did I mention? Majel's in it.