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NYC

Deep Throat Uncovered? Redundant

DEEP THROAT"? What a silly question. Of course he knows "Deep Throat," said the clerk at Show World Center, on Eighth Avenue.

"Over in the classics section," he said, flicking his head toward a rack of DVD's. Then he decided to look for it himself. He rummaged through cinematic icons like "Behind the Green Door," "The Devil in Miss Jones" and "Alice in Wonderland," definitely not the Lewis Carroll version. Alas, no "Deep Throat."

"It's a very fast-moving DVD," the clerk said apologetically. That was comforting, in its own way. It was nice to hear that there are certain eternal.

Don't get carried away, another Show World clerk cautioned. "Deep Throat," the X-rated film that gave Linda Lovelace a fame she later renounced, is not as popular as it once was. It's so 1970's.

What's hot now? "Paris Hilton is selling a lot," he said, pointing to a poster for "One Night in Paris." Also "Island Fever 3," he said.

Nah, we prefer to stick with the classics. That is true now more than ever, what with hubbub over the unmasking of Deep Throat this week.

THAT, as you surely know unless you've been away on Neptune, was the name that The Washington Post borrowed from the film and gave to its secret source in the Watergate scandal three decades ago. Its Deep Throat turns out to be W. Mark Felt, No. 2 at the F.B.I. back then. Case closed. Now the only abiding mystery left in the universe is what was the greatest thing *before* sliced bread.

Somehow, it seemed wrong to let this historic moment pass without asking about the film "Deep Throat." What better way than to visit X-rated shops on Eighth Avenue in the 40's, which have resisted city crackdowns and even thrived. (Tough work, this column-writing business.)

The blogorrhea over The Post's Deep Throat has not ignited a sudden passion for the movie. Still, it holds its own.

That seems to be the consensus along Eighth Avenue. "People like the classics," a cashier at the Playpen explained.

But not everyone does, said a young clerk at Gotham City. At the mention of "Deep Throat," he wrinkled his nose. "The people who come looking for it are the VHS's," he said,

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Linda Lovelace

making VHS sound like code for AARP.

Given his youth, he probably had no idea what a storm "Deep Throat" created when it was released in 1972. Local and federal authorities tried to ban it.

Many feminists, too, were appalled by this tale of a woman who — sorry, but there's no delicate way to say

it — had a clitoris in the back of her throat.

Those were some battles, said Herald Price Fahringer, a Manhattan lawyer who has long represented sex shops against attempts to shut them down. In 1973, he went to Buffalo to defend the owners of a small theater that was "packing them in" with "Deep Throat."

"We had a local police guy there, he was a zealot, and so he went after the film," Mr. Fahringer said. "I had to see it. You can't argue a case where the content is important without seeing it.

"When I went to the theater, they were lined around the block. He took me in, the owner, and he goes to the edge of the aisle and says to this guy, 'Hey, you're going to have to find another seat.' He empties out that seat, and puts me in it. That's how I saw the film."

"Eventually, the judge found it not to be obscene," he said. The case was thrown out, something to do with an item called the First Amendment.

"Deep Throat" was not any old dirty movie, Mr. Fahringer said. "I find most of the material that I defend distasteful from a personal standpoint," he said. "But this film had some clever ideas in it."

IT is certainly durable. Made for under \$25,000 by its director, Gerard Damiano, it has earned, by some estimates, more than \$600 million in rentals and sales over the years.

"It's an icon," said Fenton Bailey, who has directed, with Randy Barbato, a documentary film called "Inside Deep Throat."

"It's an outlaw voice speaking out with a message about sex and sexuality — that there's no such thing as normal," Mr. Bailey said by phone from Los Angeles. "Everybody has a unique sexual DNA, and Linda Lovelace represents that. She goes on this quest to find her sexual identity but also, by extension, her social and political identity."

He may be right.

Frankly, we never gave the matter that much thought. We do wonder, though, about the possibilities were another Watergate to occur today.

Would a newspaper call its mystery source Paris Hilton? We're not that desperate yet.

Are we?