

Movie Review: 'Grindhouse'

by David_Elliott

How do you like your pulp - baked or fried? In the pulp double that is "Grindhouse," Robert Rodriguez bakes a load of stale if bloody pastry called "Planet Terror," while Quentin Tarantino fries up a tasty mess of fun with "Death Proof."

'GRINDHOUSE' - Rose McGowan, Freddy Rodriguez, Marley Shelton and Naveen Andrews star in the action movie 'Grindhouse.' CNS Photo courtesy of Rico Torres.

"Planet Terror," the most intentionally aged and streaked movie since part of the "Citizen Kane" newsreel was tortured at RKO, is a shapeless cram session of zombie hokum about toxic pollution driving hicks and go-go girls to morbid excess. Rose McGowan is fairly amusing as a pole dancer who loses her leg, jams in a stick of wood, then trades in that for a machine gun.

Shoddy but stuffed, the film shows Rodriguez at his most self-indulgent. The old Z-pix of the drive-ins and grind houses mostly attempted some plot coherence, and their earnestly cheap ineptitude made them enjoyable. But this camp-out is too lavish but careless of story to be more than a gluttoned regurgitation.

As gore piles up, the monsters and revengers and screaming babes seem to be in on a large public joke with no point. Russ Meyer directed better stuff in his sleep (and lurid sleep it must have been). Main payback duke Freddy Rodriguez is more of a TV joke star than a macho lead (we miss Danny Trejo, who stars in a pulp parody trailer in sub-Bronson mode called "Machete").

After all the slime, sores and severed limbs, plus Texas BBQ mania and go-go gumption, Rodriguez falls back on past form. He wraps with a preen of La Raza pride. Like a "viva" after vivisection.

Tarantino's party, "Death Proof," puts burning wheels on pop feminism. Eight beautiful women turn up, though not Pam Grier. Four (including Sydney Tamiia Poitier) are tracked by Elvistic stunt driver and thrill maniac Kurt Russell, while four others teach him not to mess with Texas (or Tennessee, or New Zealand) females.

Russell turns superbly from stud sneers to whining, while the women (notably Rosario Dawson and Zoe Bell) inject current go-girl vitamins into the male road rampage genre. Behind an explicit "Vanishing Point" tribute is the spirit of "Thunder Road" (plus "Thelma & Louise"). Tarantino's photography is cheesy in a stylish way, edited with his usual savvy.

If his love of "girl posse" dialogue is stretched too far, the women have great zest and body language, and the only real problem with the movie is that it follows the Rodriguez. But that is a pulp pitfall.

RATINGS4 STARS - Excellent.3 STARS - Worthy.2 STARS - Mixed.1 STAR - Poor.0 - Forget It (a dog) A Dimension Films release. Directors, writers: Robert Rodriguez, Quentin Tarantino. Cast: Michael Biehn, Jeff Fahey, Michael Parks, Freddy Rodriguez, Naveen Andrews, Kurt Russell, Rosario Dawson, Tracie Thoms, Zoe Bell, Rose McGowan. Running time: 3 hours, 7 minutes. Rated R. "Planet Terror" 1 star. "Death Proof" 3 stars.

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