

Movie Review: 'The Condemned'

by David_Elliott

Wrestling star "Stone Cold" Steve Austin can't act. His compensation, at least in "The Condemned," is that he can't be killed.

As Riley, a federal undercover agent and commando so bulky he could only go undercover in a titanic black hole, Austin is roped in with other "Death Row contestants from Third World prisons" for a "reality" snuff program. Much as in the wittier Japanese film "Battle Royale," they're dropped on an obscure Asian island to kill one another off for the video cameras, with explosive devices strapped to their ankles.

'THE CONDEMNED' - Steve Austin and Masa Yamaguchi get muddy in 'The Condemned.' CNS Photo courtesy of Vince Valitutti. Despite the show's rogue status and lack of sponsors, slimy "genius" producer Ian Breckel (Rick Hoffman) is confident of a vast Web audience and gorgeous income. And somehow he figures to escape reprisal from government trackers who notice Riley on the show and, rather sheepishly, come to his aid.

Breckel thinks Riley is just a buff hick sprung from a foreign prison, and the genius even sees a payoff in geopolitical terms: "With anti-Americanism rampant all over the globe, people are going to hate this cowboy!" Jeez, is this one more thing to pin on Bush?

Gross, serial sadism quickly eliminates most fighters, including the svelte black girl who looks like her top previous action was elbowing into a changing booth at a fashion shoot. A Mexican hulk gets burned alive after watching his girlfriend tortured, raped and killed.

Riley keeps trying to help, nearly always too late, yet only he can take out a vile and dominant British brute. Director Scott Wiper, whose name (like his script) suggests toilet paper, surely knows that Austin as an actor is barely a piece of The Rock. But he can't even give him credible rough stuff, jamming Austin through chaotic close-ups so blurry they almost dissolve into random pixels.

The film's nasty premise leads to nasty offshoots. Some members of Breckel's filming team fall into the same queasy guilt of voyeurism we do (or should). They condemn him as "sick," but then slink back to work. He sneers.

"The Condemned" invites us to condemn our own wallowing. Shouldn't that lead to refunds? This movie has all the appeal of road kill repeatedly worked over by insane truckers.

RATINGS 4 STARS - Excellent. 3 STARS - Worthy. 2 STARS - Mixed. 1 STAR - Poor. 0 - Forget It (a dog) Beyond ugly, it's stone cold stupid. You wonder what steroids Austin took to plug up his brain while he went so grimly through the motions.

A Lionsgate Films release. Director: Scott Wiper. Writers: Scott Wiper, Rob and Andy Hedden. Cast: Steve Austin, Vinnie Jones, Robert Mammone, Rick Hoffman, Sam Healy, Madeleine West. Running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes. Rated R. 0 stars.

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