

Robert Rodriguez's 'Machete' Pushes Excess Past Breaking Point

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 3, 2010 - 12:29am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Not everything should be filet mignon. Sometimes you just want a greasy, delicious cheeseburger. Now imagine eating ten of those cheeseburgers in a row. Robert Rodriguez's "Machete" starts as a wonderful gore-fest but falls victim to its creator's inability to realize he doesn't need to answer to every violent vision he can dream up. The film is proof that even extremely over-the-top films can be monotonous in that their one tone is "ARGH!"

"Machete" started as a fake preview in the "Grindhouse" double feature that Rodriguez made with Quentin Tarantino that consisted of "Planet Terror" and "Death Proof" along with other made-up B-movie trailers by Rob Zombie, Edgar Wright, and Eli Roth. Instead of just starting over, Rodriguez devised "Machete" around that original preview, working from the footage he shot for it and even incorporating it into the full film. So, yes, you could actually use the "Grindhouse" footage of "Machete" as a preview for the 2010 film. That's kind of brilliant.

And the way Rodriguez builds on his original B-movie concept of a man with a knife for a nickname is admittedly somewhat brilliant as well. Not unlike the way the Blaxploitation flicks of the '70s used genre to make sociopolitical commentary, Rodriguez uses "Machete" to offer an extreme controversy on the immigration debate in 2010. He imagines a world where the border isn't just divisive or dangerous but downright ludicrous.



Machete

Photo credit: Fox

The film starts with Machete (stone-faced Danny Trejo) as a Federale trying to track down the notorious drug dealer Torrez (Steven Seagal). When his enemy gets the jump on him and decapitates Machete's wife in front of him, the man becomes a myth. Three years later, he pops up as a day laborer in a Texan border town and just happens to be chosen by the nefarious Booth (Jeff Fahey) to attempt an assassination of Senator McLaughlin (Robert De Niro), a clear characterization of Sen. McCain and his battle against illegal immigration.

McLaughlin does not just talk tough when it comes to stopping the flow of Mexicans over the border, he does something about it, going as far as to go on night trips with the maniacal Von (Don Johnson) to pick off immigrants with a rifle as they attempt to cross. An electrified fence won't be enough for McLaughlin. He would rather all Mexicans end up dead.

Naturally, the assassination attempt is merely a set-up and Machete finds himself on the run from everyone. Lucky for him, he has a super-sexy Customs Officer on his side named Sartana (Jessica Alba) and eventually draws the attention of Luz (Michelle Rodriguez) and her band of revolutionaries. Before you know it, "Machete" is exploding in an orgy of violence not unlike the majority of Rodriguez's "Planet Terror." It seems likely that a midnight movie marathon will someday include both "Grindhouse" and the fake movie that became a reality in "Machete."



Machete

Photo credit: Fox

The lesson here is that what works hysterically in a two-minute fake preview does not necessarily translate to a feature film. There are undeniably clever moments peppered throughout the film and I almost want to recommend it just for a few of those moments (including a machine-gun-toting Lindsay Lohan in a nun's habit and Machete's implementation of his recently learned fact that the intestine is sixty feet long) but the movie wears out its welcome long before the final act. Rodriguez just doesn't know when to quit.

Through it all, Rodriguez coaxes performances that are either intentionally cheesy to match the B-movie film or merely bad. You decide. Trejo works as a one-note anti-hero in that we don't actually need a lot of depth from a character named Machete. We just want him to kick some ass. But what's the excuse for the lame work by De Niro, Fahey, Johnson, and especially Seagal. Rodriguez and Cheech Marin are having fun but most of the supporting cast is as over-the-top as the body count.

Basically, "Machete" reaches its breaking point after about forty-five minutes and there's still an hour of film to go. Movies like this one walk the fine line between grindhouse homage and general stupidity. "Machete" crosses that line.

"Machete" stars Danny Trejo, Robert De Niro, Jessica Alba, Steven Seagal, Michelle Rodriguez, Jeff Fahey, Cheech Marin, Don Johnson, Shea Whigham, and Lindsay Lohan. It was written by Robert Rodriguez and Alvaro Rodriguez and directed by Robert Rodriguez & Ethan Maniquis. The film is rated R and opens on September 3rd, 2010.

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