

‘Machete Kills’ So Over the Top, it Has No Bottom

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 11, 2013 - 8:16am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – You gotta love director Robert Rodriguez. When other filmmakers are slogging through their important films, he’s out convincing big stars to blow off cinematic fireworks, giggling all the time. The excess is the thing, more so and more so, in his new film “Machete Kills.”

Another great notion about the character of Machete, portrayed with stoic abandon by Danny Trejo, is that he began as a character in a fake trailer (“Grindhouse” from 2007) and then became his own film series. After the feature debut “Machete” in 2010, director Robert Rodriguez revisits the Mexican marauder in “Machete Kills” and brings along some celebrity heroes and villains – including Charlie Sheen (listed as Carlos Estevez) as the President. This is a shoot-em-up, blow-em-up, sex-em-up carnival of a thrill kill cult movie. The pay offs overshadow the dead spots and the redundancy of the bullets flying, and provides enough grindhouse touches and bizarre laughs to entertain.

Machete (Danny Trejo), the Mexican lawman turned renegade, is recruited by the President (Charlie Sheen) to go into Mexico and stop cartel operator Mendez (Demián Bichir) from shooting a nuclear missile at Washington, D.C. The bipolar Mendez has strapped the timer to his beating heart, so Machete must take him out alive across the walled Mexican/American border.



Machete (Danny Trejo) Escorts Mendez (Demian Birchir) in ‘Machete Kills’
Photo credit: Open Road Films (II)

There are several factors working against this – including a bounty placed on Machete’s head worth a million bucks. This gets Madame Desdemona (Sonia Vergara) and her brothel agents involved, and the notorious disguise artist El Chamaleón (portrayed by Walton Goggins, Cuba Gooding Jr., Lady Gaga and Antonio Banderas). As time ticks away on the nuclear device, Machete discovers that the madman behind it all is the notorious Luther Voz (Mel Gibson).

The “plot” is inconsequential. It is about the weaponry, women and quality kills that Machete either inflicts or encounters. In the tradition of the grindhouse – the term refers to the sound of film put through too many times in an old 1970s projector, and the theaters that exhibited these films – director Rodriguez piles on the exploitative qualities, and presents big movie and TV stars having the time of their lives portraying them. This is a sneak-a-six-pack-into-the-theater type movie, as some self medication truly helps the experience.

The movie, TV and pop stars have various levels of success chewing on their scenery. Sofia Vergara obviously wants to shed a bit of her “Modern Family” image, as she spits out her tough girl dialogue and wears the leather bustier. Mel Gibson is a bit too uncomfortably oily as Voz, his latest reputation prejudices even the most cartoonish of roles. Charlie Sheen as the President is a couple years behind the joke. But El Camaleón (The Chameleon) is a lot of fun, as Cuba Gooding Jr. becomes Lady Gaga becomes Antonio Banderas. There is no need to ask why, the film itself doesn’t explain it.

The cartoon violence is a bit over-the-top, probably because the country has been dealing with too many real life bullets lately. Yet it is so stupidly presented that its impossible to analyze or personalize it, beyond turning away from the screen at the bloodier parts. The take-off on the 1970s exploitation films also contains bodacious babes in midriff and cleavage exposing leather outfits, but these ladies are also kicking ass and taking names – including former child actor Alexa Vega, who charmed audiences in Rodriguez’s “Spy Kids” series, and now provides evidence that she’s all grown up.



Presto, Chango: El Camaleón (Lady Gaga) in ‘Machete Kills’
Photo credit: Open Road Films (II)

Machete is for certain tastes – given that the violence is gory, the weapons numerous and the various human killing machines operational – but what really lessens the impact is some plot excesses that don’t work. Danny Trejo as Machete feels more in the background in his own film, as the various subplots have to play out. The talking villainy of Mel Gibson has a dull edge to it, again the real life meanderings of Mr. G. has rendered his movie persona moot. And yes, there is so much quality killing, that it borders on redundancy. But why complain? We’re not watching “Machete Knits.”

And yes, Rodriguez previews a Machete sequel, with a basis for more over-the-top melee satire. Melee Satire – that is a new movie term, kids – courtesy of Robert Rodriguez, Machete and your humble Über-Critic.

“Machete Kills” opens everywhere on October 11th. Featuring Danny Trejo, Alexa Vega, Charlie Sheen, Mel Gibson, Antonio Banderas, Lady Gaga, Cuba Gooding Jr., Amber Heard, Demián Bichir and Sonia Vergara. Screenplay by Kyle Ward from a story by Robert Rodriguez and Marcel Rodriguez. Directed by Robert Rodriguez. Rated “R”



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