

‘The Purge: Anarchy’ Can’t Decide What it Wants to Be

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 17, 2014 - 8:26pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “The Purge: Anarchy” is a cake-and-eat-it film. On one hand there is a monotonous display of firepower, courtesy of a suspension of laws for one night a year, but it also wants to temper this lawlessness with indictments of government, the rich and the law itself.

The writer and director James DeMonaco definitely has a point of view in the film – the sequel to the successful first film, “The Purge” – but it is so scattered and tenuous, and the gun battles so numerous and ferocious, that any editorializing gets lost in the spent shells. The film is boosted by a fine cast, led by Frank Grillo, and they do add a bit more to the running, hiding and shooting aspect of the story. There are reasons for the motivations of Grillo’s character, which are so contrary to the philosophy of The Purge that it is laughable, even though it’s tragic. DeMonaco seemed afraid to completely go after wealth and the government, which are obviously behind the promotion of the Purge law, and that waters down the overall narrative until it just becomes about the guns...again.

In the new America, one night a year is set aside for “The Purge,” a 12 hour period when anyone can take to the streets and do what they want with abandon – all laws, including murder, are suspended for one day. A good number of the citizens participate, but a number of them simply want to hide until it’s over, like the couple Shane and Liz (Zach Gilford and Kiele Sanchez). Unfortunately, their car breaks down outside the city.



Leo (Frank Grillo) Takes it to the Streets in ‘The Purge: Anarchy’

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Shane and Liz are on the run, but eventually they hook up with an armed-to-the-teeth vigilante named Leo (Frank Grillo), and together they form a gang of their own along with a mother and daughter (Carmen Ejogo and Zoe Soul), who had been forced out of their apartment by the Purging marauders. Along the way, there is an auction by rich folks to get in on the kill, and reminders of the New Founding Fathers of America.

There is a lot to work with regarding the Purge concept, but presumably the draw for the film’s audience is the suspension of laws and the use of rapidly firing guns and weapons to get revenge, based on what is shown. The shoehorning of the rich-witch attitudes are intriguing, but it never goes anywhere, and is way overshadowed by masked men and the overwrought use of machine guns.

Frank Grillo is developing into a great action character actor, and in doing the heavy lifting in the film – both emotionally and as a vigilante – he adds some necessary spice to the street battles. All the supporting characters have their moments, and DeMonaco did a great job of casting. Even the marauders on the streets have a bit extra to them, with their masks and mystery. It’s hard to fathom that making this type of story work requires some decent acting, but the cast brings their A-game.

DeMonaco is trying to make a point with his strange prayers to the New Founding Fathers (what happened to other religions?), and the obvious let-them-eat-cake perspective on wealthy folks. But I think if you’re are going to go that route, how about some satisfying Marie Antoinette-type justice? Besides a half hearted strafing of a rich person’s ‘viewing booth,” there are few executions of those pesky one percenters. If DeMonaco believes they are part of of the problem, off with their heads – although that might make financing difficult for The Purge 3.



Shane (Zach Gilford) and Liz (Kiele Sanchez) Are Trapped in ‘The Purge: Anarchy’
Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Every hero has to have a motive, and Leo – the character of Frank Grillo – has his stoic rationale. This obsession is legitimate, but odd. It involves revenge, but in the eye-for-an-eye variety, which seems more emotionally crippling than an excuse for a call to arms. This is just an opinion, of course, but the motivation was an easy reason for Frank to somehow become an expert in all kinds of weaponry. In fact, in the world of the Purge, I would suspect that the firing ranges do stellar business the rest of the year.

And in the end, the business of government as quasi-religion, and getting involved in creating a psychological reasoning for the Purge – “you get your aggressions out” – seems a stretch, even with the obvious and nefarious “other reasons.” Couldn’t they just go back to denying health care for the poor?

“The Purge: Anarchy” opens everywhere on July 18th. Featuring Zach Gilford, Frank Grillo, Carmen Ejogo, Kiele Sanchez, Zoe Soul and Justina Machado. Written and directed by James DeMonaco. Rated “R”



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