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THE BATTALION

"ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO"

Starring Johnny Depp, Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek

Columbia Pictures

If there is one thing that can be learned from watching "Once Upon A Time in Mexico," it's that history has a way of repeating itself. Anyone who has seen "Desperado" or "El Mariachi" (the previous movies in the El Mariachi saga), has seen 50 percent of "Once Upon A Time in Mexico."

In this final installment of Robert Rodriguez's trilogy, Antonio Banderas returns as the avenging assassin with a penchant for playing the guitar. Between brooding on rooftops and striking wailing cords on his guitar, Banderas is caught up in a revolution that threatens to tear Mexico apart.

Thrown into the mix are Johnny Depp, playing a psychotically rough CIA agent who manages to steal every scene he's in; Salma Hayek, returning as Banderas' gal pal from Desperado; and William DaFoe as the token Mexican drug cartel leader.

Reliving the same plot of his previous movies, El Mariachi (Banderas) must avenge the death of the love of his life and stop a corrupt drug dealer. The problem is that after two movies, the viewer is left wondering if a third installment was completely necessary.

With scenes lifted directly from the previous films, Banderas' role seems confined to that of a broken record playing the same sad song over and over. His tragedy, told through ambiguous flashbacks, fails to invoke the strong emotions necessary to care for the stone-hearted killer he has become. Subplots featuring Depp and his quest for power and money easily overshadow Banderas' plight.

Fortunately for Rodriguez, most of his fans are not watching the movie for the human drama, but for the heart-pounding action his films never fail to deliver. After finishing the "Spy Kids Trilogy," one must assume Rodriguez had a hankering for a return to the blood-soaked films that made him famous.

Featuring enough dismemberments and gunplay to shake a piñata stick at, "Once Upon a Time in Mexico" manages to offer a popcorn flick that can leave the audience gasping for breath. Utilizing quick jump cuts and breakneck editing, Rodriguez presents violence and action that manage to sicken and excite.

This film demonstrates Rodriguez's commitment to bringing the Mexican culture and language to the forefront of cinema. "Once Upon a Time in Mexico" does not disappoint in this category. With the heavy reliance on the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead and a large percentage of the movie shot in Spanish with English subtitles, Rodriguez continues to expose people to aspects of Mexican culture that may otherwise never be shown in an action film.

With action-packed scenes that top some of this summer's biggest blockbusters and a wonderful performance by Johnny Depp, "Once Upon a Time in Mexico" manages to overcome a recycled plot and substandard characterization. It is a mustsee for any fan of the action genre.

Rodriguez has a bright career ahead of him in the movie industry, and this film serves to showcase his continually evolving style.

--Robert Saucedo



"CABIN FEVER"

Starring Rider Strong, Jordan Ladd

Lion's Gate Pictures

Though it begins with a premise straight in any clichéd horror movie, "Cabin Fever" quid ly becomes a highly original story that manage to satisfy and scare. In the vein of shock file past, "Cabin Fever" prides itself on its standar story with a healthy dose of originality: a gm of stranded teenagers must fight for their live against an unstoppable killing force.

The scary part is the killer is all too reali today's modern world. Instead of the "booge, man" or creepers that too often haunt the home section of your local Blockbuster and theatre these teens must escape from flesh-eating back ria. This highly contagious disease is apth named for its ability to attack and destroy tissue wide are afflicted as fast as surgeons can remove it. The disease called necrotising fasciitis, consists of spreading flesh-eating bacteria in a body.

The story begins when a group of fun-seeking college students decides to take a vacation from its studies with a trip into the woods. Obvious never having seen any of the "Evil Dead" movies, these students pick a creepy little cabi deep in the heart of the forest.

Featuring a cast of largely unknown actor with the exception of "Boy Meets World" @ star Rider Strong, "Cabin Fever" has its share witty dialogue, but is largely hindered by st standard acting. Fortunately, the audience treated to a supporting cast of eccentric count folk that includes a seemingly racist old man a a mentally challenged karate kid. These charac ters function as a vibrant group that has as mud a character as the four students.

Once the students settle into their cabin, the partying is interrupted by a sick man with am terious disease who enters their car, and one quently leaves behind traces of the bacteria Stuck in the woods, the kids must find a way home and avoid the quickly spreading contaging that threatens to kill them all.

With horrifying special effects, the viru slowly spreads. The real threat to the students unfortunately, is not the virus, but their reaction to it. Upon their realization of its potential danger, the teens quickly resort to self-preservation, blood sugar. I ha

Though the movie is riddled with plot holes large enough to drive an ambulance through, the deal with having movie's breakneck storyline does not leave audi ences with a chance to examine these discrepa cies until after the movie is over, and by that time they have already been won over by the outrageous ending that must be seen to appreciate.

-- Robert Saucedo



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