

The Popcorn Papers

A Movie Review

By

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"Brothers Separated by Gene Slicing"



Balls of Fury



David: *Balls of Fury* is one of the reasons I love doing our fall reviews. The movies suck. The transition of September/August is when school starts for the majority of America, movie releases are in between summer blockbuster and Halloween horror films and November big budget family films. So this approximately 1 month period is when studios dump all their films that they had very little hope for, or they over-hyped and got killed in test audiences. If you go back through past years of *The Popcorn Papers*, you will find that this rings true. So while brilliant films are more engrossing to watch, bad films are more fun to review.

Kevin: Well, I wouldn't say they all suck. There was... I mean I know there was this one... remembers that one with the guy.... Okay, they suck. Let's face it; this is when the studios release the movies that they don't think would survive against the summer or holiday season blockbusters. A really good indicator of this is when they release a holiday movie that is nowhere near when the holiday actually takes place. For example, maybe you noticed that the remake of *Halloween* came out this weekend, a full seven weeks before Halloween is actually celebrated. You get my drift.

So, let's just see what we have to work with here. The story focuses on Randy Daytona (Dan Fogler), a former child ping-pong prodigy who lost a big Olympic match and is now washed up, forced to perform ping-pong

tricks in out-of-the-way casinos. Out of the blue, he is contacted by FBI Agent Ernie Rodriguez (George Lopez), who wants him to go on a secret mission to infiltrate a secret high-stakes ping pong tournament hosted by elusive global criminal, Feng (Christopher Walken). First he must train with an ancient, blind ping-pong Master Wong (James Hong) and his beautiful niece, Maggie Wong (Maggie Q), before he can regain his skills and defeat the villain with his *Balls of Fury*.

D: *Balls of Fury* has two definitive feelings, both of them bad. 1. It was put together by producers riding on the coattails on the success of recent screwball comedies that were immeasurably successful, and when I say immeasurably I mean they know down to the nickel exactly how much cash rolled in. Ka-ching! 2. Someone wrote a script that may have been homage to *Enter the Dragon*, and the producers tied in *Wayne's World*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Miss Congeniality*, *Karate Kid*, several James Bond movies, and not only a bad parody of every bad 80's film, but also a bad parody of the good parodies of every bad 80's film. No really, the entire Randy, Master Fong, Maggie, scenes were straight out of *Wayne's World*, the same type of jokes, set-ups, etc. This is old hack at best. There was absolutely nothing new here until **The Chris**.

K: Ah, yes. The Chris. Mr. Walken in the house. Obviously, Walken's appearance in the movie was a big plus. It's made even more delicious in the way that he seems to be doing a parody of himself, or even doing an impression of Kevin Spacey doing an impression of him. All of the little pauses and non-sequiters that he normally launches into are exaggerated for even greater comic effect. He is clearly the coolest guy in Hollywood now that Jack Nicholson is appearing less frequently.

However, I wouldn't say that this movie was a complete loss. I actually enjoyed much of it (although I will admit to going into it with less-than-stellar expectations). First of all, the ping-pong stuff was great, even if it was completely special effects. Some of the stunts they come up with, such as Maggie playing against four guys at the same time while taking a food order over the phone, were truly original and hilarious. Many of the characters were either completely unique or brilliant satires of those in the movies Dave mentioned. And if that isn't enough to convince you, how could you pass up an opportunity to see a movie that has Ronald and Nancy Reagan in it? (Okay, fine, they were *clips* of them, but you get the picture.

D: Ahhh Robert Frost wrote that, "Two Roads diverged in a yellow wood, and Kevin picked the wrong one." Kevin may have had a different movie audience, or maybe a different test cut of the film, orah hell with it, the movie has some laughs but they all seem to come from improv between the actors rather than the directors or writers influence. In fact this movie was written and directed by the writer for *Reno 911!: Miami*, (for

those of you counting this is our third, yes third, wacky comedy review in a row, but as we try and write a family friendly column, Rod Zombie's revisioning of *Halloween* but just a bit too cutesy for us.) this and *R911M* seem to suffer from the exact same problems, when the cast is improving it works, but when the director hauls them back to script it fails every time. They are also trying to recast the same actors for cameos, i.e. Patton Oswalt, (first ping-pong guy) Thomas Lennon, (bad German ping-pong ball guy) Kerri Kenney, (Peppermill showgirl) and it just doesn't work. Many groups in film are trying to do a rotating Rat Pack and its cute and funny, but no matter how talented these actors are, this group just doesn't work. At all. They are funny in their own right but their bits step out of the film, you laugh and then we go back to the crappy premise. Oh and while we are on it, they spent waaaaaay to long to explain the back story on Randy Datona, this is one of the few movies that's 90 minutes long and they had to stretch to make it there.

There are exceptions however, Christopher Walken, they waited far too long to bring him in. Hell just order us a Walken Happy Meal and Super-Size it, then order ten more. This film needed more Walken, Walken, Walken! The other two unsung heroes were Jason Scott Lee doing his Bruce Lee characterization and Cary-Hiroiyuki Takawa. (You don't know you know him, but you know him, oh yes you do. Trust me.) Every time anyone of these guys spoke they got the best laughs. They knew what the film needed more than anyone, and they walked away with the show.

K: What do you mean the setup was too long? We need to find out why he wants to go after Feng, don't we? When he finds out that Feng killed his father over a ping-pong wager, that has to make the moment of his revenge more poignant, doesn't it? Doesn't it?

Just kidding. To associate the term "poignant" in any way with a movie of this type would be like hiring a butler to hand out Bud Lite at a Super Bowl party (actually, that would be kinda cool). I understand where Dave is coming from, and the funny thing is that, in most of our reviews, I'm arguing his part. After having seen the movie, I can read over Dave's criticisms and see the points he's making as valid. However, going into the theater, I knew only two things about the film with complete and utter certainty. One was that the movie was about ping-pong, and the other was that it cost \$7.50 to get in.

Other than that, I didn't know anyone in the cast other than Walken, I hadn't made the *Reno 911* connection and I didn't know about the alarmingly short running time of the movie (90-minute features are a thing of the past, like leg warmers and coherent foreign policy). Because I didn't know any of this, I actually was able to enjoy this film. That's why I can recommend buying a ticket for it, as long as you're specifically in the mood for this kind of "so-ridiculous-it's-funny" type of movie. Granted, its schlock, but at least its funny schlock that doesn't make you want to choke the theater manager until you get a refund.

D: So Kev and I part ways on this one, I don't think it's even rental worthy, and barely a 'nothing else on TV' worthy. But Kevin thinks there are some worthy moments in the film.

Top 5 Popcorn Pyramid

Films that feature either Jason Scott Lee (JSL) or Cary-Hiroyuki

Takawa (CHT) *INPO

Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story (JSL)

Mortal Kombat (CHT)

Rising Sun (CHT)

The Jungle Book (JSL)

The Last Emperor (CHT)

Rapa Nui (JSL)

American Me (CHT)

Memories of a Geisha (CHT)

**In No Particular Order, duh.*

The Popcorn Prognosticator

Films you might also want to look for:

Beowulf

Resident Evil: Extinction

The Darjeeling Limited

Elizabeth: The Golden Age

Gone Baby Gone

Rendition

The Mist

The Golden Compass

The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep

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