

Fango Flashback: “THE BLOOD OF HEROES”

Written by Anthony Grutz

Sunday, 13 February 2011 09:41



I'll be the first to admit that I don't follow football, but I completely understand its popular appeal and know the Super Bowl is the highest rated television spot each year. This epic battle between the best teams in the realm comes to its crescendo on the first Sunday in February every year. Although I don't get particularly excited about the outcome, the crazed enthusiasm for the game reminds me of a treasured film from the vault which I would toss into the arena with the successful mainstream REMEMBER THE TITANS any day. I'm talkin' about David Webb Peoples' 1989 glorious postapocalyptic sports flick THE BLOOD OF HEROES.



Best known for writing great films such as BLADE RUNNER, UNFORGIVEN and 12 MONKEYS, Peoples took to the director's chair to bring to life his vision of a desolate future in which nomadic bands of sporting combatants, known as juggers, roam the wastelands competing for both glory and survival. The story follows a jigger led by Sallow (portrayed by the legendary Rutger Hauer), an ex-league player and outcast of what's left of society. Also on Sallow's team are Mbulu (Delroy Lindo), Young Gar (a trim, post-FULL METAL JACKET Vincent D'Onofrio), Big Cimber (Anna Katarina) and the newest member, Kidda (a pre-TWIN PEAKS Joan Chen).

The sport is a wild cross between football and gladiator combat. The object of the game is for the unarmed qwik to gain control of the dog skull (the ball), run it across the field and slam it onto the spike in the end zone. The armed offense protects their qwik; the armed defense sets out to destroy him. The match is timed up to three periods as 100 stones are sequentially thrown against a metal plate. Got it?

Initially, we are introduced to Kidda in her life in a small desert village. The roving juggers come into town and challenge the local team to a match. The victory spoils include food, shelter,

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valuable tokens and sexual favors. As the match ensues, the local qwik is violently incapacitated, which leads to Kidda suiting up for the second-string. They lose, but Kidda is able to make an impression on Sallow and seriously injure his qwik, Dog Boy (Justin Monjo), in the process. There's little to live for in her pathetic village, so she trails the victors on their conquering path. Shortly it becomes apparent that Dog Boy's wounds will render him unable to compete. Kidda makes her move and begins her training. After several bloody matches in small towns along the MAD MAX-like landscape, it becomes evident that Sallow wants to return to the last power center on Earth, the Nine Cities and challenge the unbeatable "League" for riches, fame and luxury.

Having been once cast out, Sallow's determination to gain back his honor is matched only by the aggressive and youthful determination of Kidda to be the best qwik. What happens next is the stuff of legends. To not be a huge spoiler, I will just say that this amazing low-budget gem delivers a finale that stands head to head with anyone's favorite sports or sci-fi violence spectacles.



Unfortunately, the American theatrical version of BLOOD OF HEROES clipped 10 minutes right off the end and that's what you get with the Lionsgate 2003 DVD release. This hack job, combined with the DVD's poor image quality (it looks like it's been transferred from an old VHS cassette) and sound so lousy that the subtitles were necessary to hear a good bit of the dialog, proves very disappointing. I'm searching for a higher quality, widescreen version of THE BLOOD OF HEROES and always looking, of course, for the rumored Japanese release of 104 minutes edition, beating the original UK/Australia cuts of 99 minutes. I'm hopeful that one day this incredible movie will get the treatment it deserves. Listen folks, I'd even settle for a good laserdisc copy of the full cut!

In a nutshell, THE BLOOD OF HEROES is a rather amazing forgotten flick to watch as you grab some chips, dip and a drink. Let it transport you away to a gritty world of honor, sportsmanship, harsh combat and tough survival. With brilliantly bleak cinematography and enough socially acceptable athletic violence to rival any genre film ever made, THE BLOOD OF HEROES satisfies both gore lust and any latent desire for an inspirational sports drama. I'll take it over the Super Bowl anyday.

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