

“GIRLS AGAINST BOYS” (Movie Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Monday, 12 March 2012 12:40



“Pretentious” is an overused word, its meaning possibly worn down (admittedly, so is an introduction that calls something well-worn, only to explain its ongoing relevance), but *GIRLS AGAINST BOYS*, in all its armchair-feminist glory, is exactly that. Existing as a logline to reel in genre fans and hinging on a director’s name to excite the art houses, the film (which had its world premiere at the current SXSW festival) will, in truth, satisfy neither.



Following in the footsteps of a long list of exploitation classics (whose empowering intentions remain debatable), the latest film from Austin Chick (*XX/XY*) would like to believe it’s the first rape/revenge film with larger issues of gender roles and how we treat each other on its mind. It’s not, and isn’t nearly provocative enough to force a conversation, intellectually or as reaction to its displays of violence. Chick’s treatment of the onscreen bloodshed—save the rape itself (commendably handled in a decidedly non-graphic manner) and a stunning stomach slice—feels less a decision of restraint and more simply bland. Same goes for its treatment of pop culture’s misogyny, general cruelty and contradictory attitudes toward women. Simply stating there’s a problem isn’t a stance, and *GIRLS AGAINST BOYS* flipflops between having nothing to say and being unsure of what it’s trying to say—which makes it as shallow as some of its purely exploitative predecessors, just much less memorable.

The story itself concerns Shae (*FRIDAY THE 13TH*’s Danielle Panabaker), despairing over a failed fling with a married man, who heads out with new friend Lu (Nicole LaLiberte) for a

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drunken, sweaty evening that sadly ends in a sexual assault. The dangerous, empowered and stunning Lu leads Shae in a weekend-long spree of anger, cereal talk, road-trip singalongs and bloody revenge. Chick, by all means a competent filmmaker, captures everything with a disaffected and straightforward aesthetic, leaving the fever dream nature of being swept up in an impulsive murder spree feeling like the cinematic equivalent of a shoulder shrug. Whatever, NBD. This would be fine if it felt intentional, but the eventual moment of clarity and emotional arc land with a thud and feels unearned, leaving the two talented leads in the lurch, trying to pick up the slack amidst the one-note atmosphere.

GIRLS AGAINST BOYS basically fails in its aim to smartly elicit response in a titillating manner. It won't be a part of the conversation because it doesn't have a conversation to start, a factor only hurt by both its story beats and genuine New York locations that remind one of the similar, much better MS. 45.

