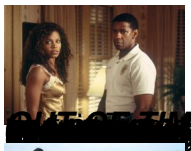
Written by Mike Schulz
Tuesday, 14 October 2003 18:00

KILL BILL: VOLUME I

Miramax's decision to release Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* in two installments was probably smart, as it'll inevitably boost the film's collective box-office intake and doesn't require audiences to commit, all at once, to a three-and-a-half-hour homage to Japanese samurai flicks.

Yet I'm also hating the folks at Miramax for the decision, because it means, come February, I'll have to sit through this trash *again*. Put simply: I *loathed Kill Bill: Volume 1*. It's a debacle, much like Oliver Stone's
Natural Born Killers
(which Tarantino originally scripted), that only a truly gifted filmmaker could make; Tarantino's technical razzle-dazzle is so overt that many viewers won't notice, or care, that
nothing
is going on in this picture. If the film has any theme at all, it's in the director's obsession with the shlocky, ultra-violent revenge fantasies of his youth – and crap in Japanese is still crap – and his attempt to mimic their brutishness, their stoic dialogue, their Zen-like focus on the art of exacting vengeance. In this, Tarantino succeeds. Big deal. The movie is nothing but an endless series of battles between Uma Thurman and those that done her wrong – brilliantly choreographed, yes, but so predictably
outré
that I started yawning after a half hour. And though he's obviously in awe of his star, Thurman's here only to be tormented and then to perform her share of tormenting. Despite valiant work, Thurman, like everyone else onscreen, is simply a pawn in Tarantino's gruesome chess match. We don't necessarily like her, but Tarantino doesn't
care
if we like her; humans aren't what interest him here. This movie reeks of smugness and condescension; if you don't like it, Tarantino seems to imply, it's because you don't
get
it.
Kill Bill: Volume 1
is Tarantino's first release in six years, and such a dismal waste of time and talent it suggests he's been alone with this material for far too long.

INTOLERABLE CRUELTY

Any fan of the Coen brothers' collective output – I consider myself an unrepentant devotee – will probably agree that even their lesser works get more entertaining with time; I, for one, didn't care for *Barton Fink*, *The Hudsucker Proxy*, or *The Big Lebowski* at first, but, after subsequent viewings, have grown enormously fond of all three. And yet, with *Intolerable Cruelty*, I'm confronted with a disturbing sensation: I don't ever want to see this one again, not because it's so terrible – the movie displays the brothers' usual technical acumen and George Clooney is often amusing – but because it's so damned *bland*. (Say what you will about the Coens, but until now, their works have never felt "Hollywood.") A screwball farce about an unscrupulous attorney (Clooney) who meets his match in a man-eating gold-digger (Catherine Zeta-Jones), *Intolerable Cruelty*, even with its presumably "nasty" edge, is by-the-numbers romantic comedy, which wouldn't be bad if the jokes were funny or Clooney and Zeta-Jones displayed romantic or comedic chemistry. Unfortunately, they aren't and they don't. Working from (and contributing to) a script by Robert Ramsey and Matthew Stone, and under the watch of *uber*-middlebrow producer Brian Grazer, the movie is slack and lifeless, and the Coens never establish any kind of comic rhythm. (Only in fringe gags – Clooney's teeth-whitening obsession, his partner's penchant for sobbing at weddings – is their comic style apparent.) Maybe this is the price the Coens must pay in order to finance offbeat works like *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*; if so, *Intolerable Cruelty* is in service of a good cause. But the film itself isn't good; it's a Coen brothers movie for people who don't *like* Coen brothers movies.

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