

Sucker Punch Review

Man, I would absolutely *love* to play a video game directed by Zach Snyder.

He has a vast imagination that houses absolutely stunning sci-fi fantasy worlds for his characters to jump, double jump, flip, kick, punch and shoot through. Paired with a competent video game studio, Snyder could make one hell of a video game. The only problem is, instead of a game, he decided to make a movie: *Sucker Punch*. He probably should have stuck with a game.

Sucker Punch is the newest movie out from the director of *Watchmen*, *The 300*, and, perhaps most famously, *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole* (kidding) and immediately, the movie unmistakably has that "Zach Snyder" feel to it; as if there was a filter in the editing software with his name on it. The whole film had the warm fuzziness and darkly saturated colors that has become Snyder's trademark, as well as the frequent inclusion of slow-mo action shots that he has become known for. Visually, the movie is an impressive menagerie of all the computer generated bells and whistles that an eighty-five million dollar budget could afford. It was the narrative that stumbled and ultimately where the audience felt the sting of the aforementioned punch.

Set in the 1950s, the story focuses on a young girl only referred to as Baby Doll, Emily Browning. After an establishing scene of an abusive step-father attacking both Baby Doll and her little sister (set to hard rock and done in almost exclusively slow-mo), Baby Doll winds up getting forcibly committed to an insane asylum. Soon after she arrives, the world shifts as Baby Doll uses her imagination to see the asylum not for what it is, but instead as a seedy night club where the girls are not committed patients, but instead indentured burlesque dancers. Then, in an extra twist, the fantasy goes one step further when Baby Doll dances and sci-fi action-packed fight scenes represent her gyrations as she and the girls she befriends fight through hoards of robots, orcs, and steam-punk Nazis. With the threat of the "High Roller" (a cameo by John Hamm, which is actually kinda cool, though continuing to only cast him in that time period)

coming in only five days, Baby Doll bands together the rag-tag gang of girls and makes for an escape.

But that's not quite it though, because Snyder, who helped write the movie, didn't just stop at "*Great Escape* meets *Inception*". He instead took it further and applied themes of the psychological thriller genre and those of female empowerment, which immediately derails the movie and ruins a perfectly cool premise. As an Action-Adventure-Sci-Fi-Fantasy movie, I totally would have been down to watch; he sets up all the *well-worn* tropes, conventions, and clichés that just such a movie tends to have. The women are in skimpy outfits, the effects are perfectly impressive, and the explosions are successfully huge. But then it was if Snyder took a step back, looked at his set of strung-together video game trailers and thought that shoe-horning in important topics would be anything other than him shoe-horning things into places they don't belong. This ultimately ruined it for me, Snyder amateurishly went about his storytelling and consequently, the movie fell flat. It felt and looked like what a forty-five year old man who has the taste of a teenager thought that 20 somethings would love to watch, and the result just got boring after a while. It had heavy-handed, stupid gestures like representing the entire idea of oppression with the threat of rape and then having the ultimate depiction of female empowerment be *not* getting raped. This kind of lack luster writing in turn makes Browning, a mostly silent protagonist, into one that is less like Clint Eastwood's strong and silent types, and more like a plastic, cheap sex doll.

I commend Snyder for attempting to put substance into his film and not being satisfied with making "just another action movie"; we don't need more Crank 2s in this world. While on paper, it's commendable, Snyder made it abundantly clear with *Sucker Punch* that he does not within himself have the emotional maturity that he wanted so desperately for his movie to convey. He has the style down and has had it down since *300*, but until Snyder gets the substance to go along with it, he'll be stuck making feature full-length video game trailers.

I give this movie half a ruin, BUT that ruin has gotten me really excited for the video game it was advertising.