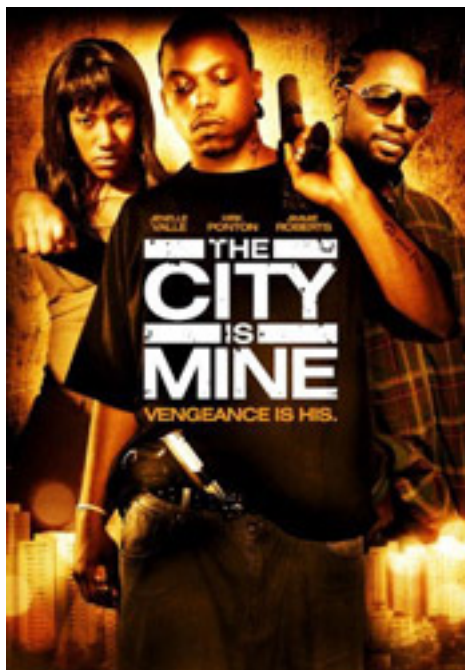


Grisly turf war takes toll in gratuitous gangsta saga

Written by Kam Williams



Some filmmakers are better at shooting fight than nude scenes which is probably why action-oriented directors like Sam Peckinpah and John Woo never had any steamy sex sequences in any of their movies. First-timer Patrick Pierre would do well to take a cue from those two screen legends, since his debut flick plays out like a jarring study in contrasts in this regard.

The *City Is Mine* is a gruesome splatter flick which is raw, realistic and riveting, at least when the narration remains focused on the high body-count turf war unfolding over narcotics among four rival gangs representing Trenton, New Jersey's North, East, West and South sides. Unfortunately, the picture loses its credibility during its laughable romantic interludes which tend to border on the embarrassing.

The problem is that the actresses here look like they want no part of being naked or scantily clad or caught on camera in compromising positions with any of their male counterparts. And a sex scene has no shot at being titillating if it looks more like kidnapping than consensual.

Otherwise, *The City Is Mine* is a throwback to that gratuitously-violent ghetto gangsta fare cranked out in the Nineties to satisfy the bloodlust of youngsters weaned on MTV and BET music videos. The fun starts when 25 year-old Gruver (Kirk Ponton) gets paroled after serving time in prison. He starts prowling the streets, intent on regaining control of the Trenton crack trade from the quartet of drug-dealing dons who have divvied up the business in his conspicuous absence.

Each one of these hoods has a name more colorful than the next. There's hotheaded Lay-a-Mother[Bleep]er Downs (uncredited) on the East side, the diminutive and relatively-mellow Lil Lev (Sergio Gay) on the North side, old school Asbo on the South side and trigger-happy Murda Will (Cary Hite) on the West side.

The film has no shortage of gun molls either, most notably Erica (Omega Xavia), the good girl

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who finds herself attracted to bad boy Gruver against her better judgment, and India (uncredited), a Panamanian who ran a prostitution ring for him while he was behind bars, making 100% profit by enslaving “[B-words] from the Dominican Republic.” However, you know a movie has serious issues when so many leading cast members are too embarrassed by their performances to allow their names to be printed in the picture’s press kit.

Watching *The City Is Mine*, it’s hard to say whether this flick is a cautionary tale or an endorsement of exploitation, illegality, profanity, ethnic slurs and black-on-black crime. I couldn’t discern much of a message, just a lot of senseless slaughter and misogynistic mayhem punctuated by unintentionally comical romantic clinches. And for some people, that’s entertaining enough. .

A cinematic glass that’s likely to be deemed half-empty or half-full, depending on the eye of the beholder.

Good (2 stars)

Unrated

In English and Spanish with subtitles.

Running time: 105 minutes

Studio: Pierre Films/Maverick Entertainment Group

To see a trailer for *The City Is Mine*, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4hfKpCJjG8>