

In Praise of Bad Films

by Fergus Downie



At a time when Hollywood is obsessed with its own self importance it is odd that so few memorable films are being made, and that even the best have so few of the signature moments that make them immortal. Those of a particular vintage will know what I'm talking about. They were the kind of films your old man came in for just to see the iconic set pieces – the motorcycle chase in *The Great Escape*, the primate wielding the first tool in *Space Odyssey*, and the excruciating Colomboesque moment in *Psycho* where Arbogast traps Norman Bates ('if it don't gel it ain't aspicand this isn't gelling').

The latest offerings by contrast just drag on as piously and predictably as a teenage sulk and the lack of memorable scenes is a mirror of the utter pointlessness of it all. Very postmodern- lots of slick, very little trope. Thus the daydream world of candy floss sensations it churns out with all its dreary racial and gender motifs. It's the tepid

imagination of CNN wearily grafted onto the soft underbelly of America's even softer culture and the sermonising reflects a general unraveling of irony and discerning judgement. Ironically it aims a little too high – entertainment is just that. If you want to be 'uplifted' start with a book – and build the strength of character required to appreciate a crap film.

Growing up in the 80s I had plenty of the stuff, and it made me the renaissance man I am today. *Who Dares Wins* (worse than anything Americans could dare to inflict on vulgar appetites), *Commando* and the *Rambo* trilogy were spectacularly (and enjoyably) bad films but even school boys knew it and we didn't expect an education in life from them. They werehow can I put it, what they were, and I still like it when I can get them, especially if the titles clunk painfully. Of those surviving fragments John Rambo's geriatric finale in 'Last Blood' is magnificently bad, the more so as Brian Deneghy wasn't there to let good acting creep in and mar the enjoyment. It wasn't high art but it was simultaneously violent and wholesome. That's easier said than done these days and one can't in any case be a genius every day. And who would not want John Rambo for president