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movie review

A lot could have gone wrong with such a specific sort of film. It's underground. It's two claims to fame are more known for music than acting (though one went on to bigger things, by which I mean a David Cronenberg film). It's over-the-top and campy. The whole cast derives not from the cream of the crop of thespians. It appeals to an esoteric audience.

But, everything this film did, it did on purpose. It doesn't take itself any more seriously than it has to. It's a case of deliberate camp working just fine. Camp typically "works" best when it is the result of sincere but misguided efforts at making art or popular art, regardless of medium. Hence, the best camp is often unintentional. Efforts to deliberately make camp probably misfire as often as not.

Here, it works. This is, after all, a movie about punk rock. In effect, this is a punk movie. The same attitude and approach that goes into the best punk went into this. It's a small cult film, pure and simple, and it hits its target (and target audience) dead center.

Now, on to the plot: A terrible band named Hindenburg wants so badly to get heard that they kidnap their punk rock idol, an arrogant, narcissistic, drug glutton named Spazz-O. The band doesn't know what the hell it's doing. Spazz-O lives up to his name. The cops are blunderers, too, and in the midst of all this is Adam Ant as Spazz-O's manager, who, with his ex-porn star girlfriend (Spazz-O's wife), is plotting to off Spazz-O. Ant stands to benefit because he tricked Spazz-O into signing a contract giving him control of the Spazz-O empire. Enter an assassin who just can't seem to get the job done, thanks in part to the antics of the idiots in Hindenburg.

But when Debbie Harry, playing Thor (not the god), a record label exec, steps into the picture, the scheme changes. Spazz-O's kidnapping, publicized through a video Hindenburg shot (masks on faces, reminiscent of Slipknot visually if not audio-wise) to prove Spazz-O is still alive, has skyrocketed his dwindling popularity. Suddenly, he's worth more alive than dead.

It's everybody against everybody.

There's not a competent character in the bunch and the plot goes from simmer to intentionally idiotic boil as nutcase after nutcase runs amok, each with his own agenda, and none of them smart enough to pull it off right. To complicate things, a nationalist terrorist group that incorrectly gets the blame for the kidnapping decides to be guilty of the accusation. So EVERYBODY wants Spazz-O and Spazz-O wants none of them. The zany-upon-zany approach to the movie and the sincerity of those involved results in a truly enjoyable film. It's fun and is as punk as the bands in the scene it so obviously loves.

This mid-90s late nighter is worth a look for those into underground cult cinema, punk rock and new wave and aficionados of weird cinema generally. An interesting note: This was directed by the Adam Dubin, who co-directed The Beastie Boys' videos "(You Gotta) Fight For Your Right (to Party!)" and "No Sleep Till Brooklyn".

Incidentally, the Cronenberg film to which I referred was "Videodrome," featuring James Woods and Debbie Harry.

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Upchuck Undergrind listens to a little bit of a lot of things - just note the eclecticism of his reviews. He also reads voraciously and loves movies. He is a very open-minded Episcopalian (and student of Buddhism and Hinduism) who thinks Slayer is one of the greatest metal bands. Ever. In addition to his work with Corazine - for which he has written since its inception (he is a Fishcomcollective veteran) - he also writes for DJFix.com and B-Scared.com (his horror/exploitation review site).

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