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Scratchy, Pulpy Fun

By [Josef Woodard](#), April 12, 2007

Grindhouse

Rose McGowan, Freddy Rodriguez, Rosario Dawson, Tracie Thoms, and Kurt Russell star in films written and directed by Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino.

Warning: This pulpy, exploitative satire/tribute, featuring Robert Rodriguez's neo-zombie movie *Planet Terror* and Quentin Tarantino's stunt-person sexual psychodrama *Death Proof*, is teeming with certifiably nasty stuff. It contains scenes of extreme violence (extreme to the point of outlandishly funny), dismemberment, oozing and bubbling open wounds, sexually coded car stunts, immoral themes, and political incorrectness. Filmically, the double-feature showcases what looks like scratchy or jerky prints played on dubious projectors (do not touch that dial or complain to theater management) and includes one scene — a sex scene, alas — where the film catches and “burns,” as in Bergman's *Persona*, but minus the existential angst.

All that said, there's also something weirdly warm and fuzzy about the whole grizzly project. That's partly because Rodriguez and Tarantino are tapping directly into a nostalgic vein of cheapo cinema, the world ruled by Roger Corman, which reveled in sensory whiz bang and thematic daring beneath the shameless low-budget action on screen.

Seen back to back, the aesthetics of Rodriguez and Tarantino are necessarily subject to compare-and-contrast viewing. With echoes of *El Mariachi* and *Sin City*, Rodriguez's film is all about dense, down-and-dirty action in a Texas town invaded by a chemical warfare infestation and an army of new-millennium zombies. Rodriguez has an ace anti-heroine in Rose McGowan, a dispirited go-go dancer who loses a leg but gains a vengeance-spewing appendage and a kick-ass spirit in the melee.

But comparatively, Tarantino's artfulness mixes more seamlessly with his grit, as it does in his best movies, especially his masterpiece *Pulp Fiction* and in *Jackie Brown*. There are long atmospheric passages in which character-building and philosophical asides sneak into the mix before the outbursts of vehicular violence, in this case in the form of macho stunt cars. (Some of the dizzying car action was shot just outside Buellton, if the terrain looks familiar to locals and/or fans of *Sideways*.)

Overall, *Grindhouse* is a unique concept in a time when uniqueness and Hollywood seem like strange bedfellows. For three-plus hours, you sink into your seat, admire the irony-laden artistry, squirm and fidget during the violent bits, and laugh at the nutty preview trailers for non-existent flicks. It's enough to trigger longing for the days when Santa Barbara had three (count 'em) drive-in movie screens. But that's another story, sort of.