

Sin City. Directed by Robert Rodriguez, Frank Miller (who wrote and I guess drew the original comic book “graphic novel”), Quentin Tarentino (“Special Guest Director”... hunh?). Starring: Bruce Willis, Mickey Rourke (see if you can find him), Clive Owen, Michael Madsen (fat, scroungy guy from *Reservoir Dogs*; fat, scroungy guy from *Thelma and Louise*; fat scroungy guy from *Kill Bill*), Benicio del Toro (dirtbag from *Day of the Gun*; dirtbag from *Snatch*; dirtbag from *Traffic*); Elijah Wood (tousle-haired cutesy Hobbit from *Rings*, pretty much breaking out of the ol’ type cast here as four-eyes demented homosexual Zen cannibal... uh, sorry! Didn’t mean to ruin it for you...) annnnnnd... every high cheekbones, pouty lips, pneumatic did I say pouty lips? starlet on the duty roster (Rosario Dawson, Jessica Alba, Brittany Murphy, Jamie King, Carla Gugino, Devon Aoki, and on and on, whoa, buddy! ...one “bulging Aphrodite” after another, glossed by light, damned by night...); Barbra Streisand as the ’57 Chevy Nomad.

Great movie if it weren’t such a lousy movie. *Pulp Infarction*, I guess you could call it. Tarentino’s heavy hand: three stories woven together, unstuck in time, ultra violence. In gorgeous black and white (go rent *Maltese Falcon*), where all those venetian blind slats and window frame mullions cast angular shadows across arced, pallid flesh; gloom-choked alleys whose walls seem to ooze blood; sunless rooms empty of everything but horror (oozing *what* you don’t wanna know...); dimlit highways to no place viscous with last night’s rain and this morning’s pain; doomed losers shuffling tenebrous through lives of despair in search of... what? a little dignity before dying, a small gesture of grace before checking noisily and violently out, an instant of grandeur *in extremis* even from one of Nature’s lesser creatures.... namely *us*! But... since the black and white palette—whole “values” in a half world where darkness reigns—leaves too much for us dumbos to dope out our own selves, these guys “intervene” through random colorizing... so we don’t not miss nothing (Spielberg’s little girl with the red dress in *Schindler*): we get *another* red dress snaked lovingly about the form of the fated not to say fatal beauty who invites us into this universe; the blue eyes of a fierce but avenging lover; the yellow blood (or is it pus?) spurting from a lowlife child rapist (Yeah, we got one of them... and worse, too. Might wanna check this one out before you trot little Tiffany and young Brownstone up to the thee-ay-tor. “Stylized violence,” the raters—who gave it an “R” not an “X” on account of there’s no sex, only sexuality—claim... oh, and is that “stylized hair” that Bruce Willis is sporting?). Stunning. It’s just, sadly, that the film has nothing to say. Not, of course, that random brutality isn’t entertainment enough (and that’s the proud owner of the *complete* Steven Seagal Heritage Collection on DVD wide screen director’s cut speaking, too...), but what’s happened that the “visual” has got dee-voiced from the “spiritual” and that guys who can draw can’t hope?

Anyhow. It’s Sin City, where the women (high cheekbones, pouty lips... *no* jeans!) have taken over the sin trade, skin trade annnnnnnnd... the neighborhood where it’s plied, cutting a deal (you’re free to guess on what terms) with the cops. Woe betide the dumbo who stumbles onto the Island of the Amazons with a heavy fist or light wallet. Meanwhile, Gail (Rosario Dawson in heels and not much else, easily as venomous as when she takes on Alexander that doubtful male’s wedding night), the queen bee in this hive (where *all* the males are doubtful), guarantees the safety of her sisters through a) respect for the sin-shielding “deal” and b) reliance on the sword-wielding Mai (or something, wordless enforcer Devon Aoki, holdover motif from Tarentino’s *Kill Bill* sequence), under whose blade we lose then find then lose the head of dirtbag or maybe not Jack “Jackie Boy” Rafferty (Benicio del Toro) a bully and woman beater

not long for Floozietown where neither Dwight (Clive Owen good bad good boyfriend) nor the leather-swaddled doxies (good bad good ~~who~~ troubled women) can keep *them* long at bay, the bad guys... and you figure you gotta be pretty bad to be bad in Sin City, hunh? Meanwhile, avenging lowlife Marv (Mickey Rourke in heavvvvvvvvy make up to match the one piece forehead/nose job on this guy in the original graphic novel, glowering and lowering as the improbable punching bag for assorted malefactors, unlikely savior for errant fee-males, implausible posterboy for tenderness (not as though the women in this thing need—ptui!—males for protection... *or* for Ess Eee Ex, if you catch my drift) takes out after the murderer of that only woman ever to make a sweet overture toward him but one of a set of twins—Lord love her since we get to watch her flounce around and jiggle stuff (if you catch my drift) which a lotta your dead people don't do—pursuing through the sewer her doer into the upper reaches of Sin City so-sigh-ity where a pedophile priest (go figure!) and a venal politician (and they said this was a comic book!) poison what would otherwise be merely a sunless paradise of brutes and washouts and perverts... you kinda wonder how a feller could contrive to be corrupt in such a place or who'd notice if he was. Meanwhile (remember Tarentino's games with time in *Bill*, in *Pulp*), weathered leathered but ree-tiring tomorrow cop Hartigan (Bruce Willis, resuscitating so to speak the "defective detective" from the 40's: angina kicks in just as he's about to do the truant...) wants to do one thing right before punching out (various senses of that word, too) and rescue little Muffy (Jessica Alba and ...woof!), shoots body parts off a putative molester (son, as it eventuates, of above venal politician Powers Boothe) but doesn't kill him, leaving elaborate vengeance simmering on that side of the stove for Yellow Bastard (not sure you want this one on your ac-toor's resume, either: *I was the guy in Sin City who got his umph umphs ripped off and...* You can see Lee Strassberg working on this scene: What's my motivation for yowling like the banshee here, now, Lee? He tears off my what? Oh, okay...). Anyhow, these three strands intertwist and twine, characters come and go (evidently never die, no matter how full you pump them of lead), parts come and go (three hand loppings, a hand eating noshing actually, two leg eatings, six count 'em six beheadings, a de-umph umphing see above, endless poundings, pummelings, beatings, crushings, cavings-in, slashings, slicings, slammings, thrashings, whangings, whalings, flailings, and on and on...). All cartoony and before a computer-gen backdrop like the one in *Sky Captain*, sorta retro future: a new world but with '57 Chevy wagons alongside (ptui!) new model Mercedes... except whoa! ...*ugly*. I guess I'd have to say that *Sin City* is the best use I've seen made of celluloid lately... and *that*, oddly enough, is at the same time my complaint.