



Faster, Babydoll! Kill!

Sucker Punch: Definitely not a KO

SUCKER PUNCH: Directed by Zack Snyder. Screenplay by Zack Snyder and Steve Shibuya; story by Snyder. Cinematography, Larry Fong. Editor, William Hoy. Music, Tyler Bates and Marius De Vries. Starring Emily Browning, Jena Malone, Abbie Cornish, Vanessa Hudgens, Carla Gugino, Jamie Chung and Oscar Isaac. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2011. 110 minutes. PG-13. ★★☆☆☆

Reader, I tried. I tried to find the good in Zack Snyder's *Sucker Punch*. I had the idea in my head — thanks to one sentence in one blog — that maybe it really was, despite all buzz to the contrary, an empowering flick. Maybe it was a movie in which strong female characters take control of their destinies. Maybe the heavy makeup and tiny outfits served a purpose.

Maybe I was a little too optimistic. *Sucker Punch* begins with an overlong prologue cued to a cover of "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)" which is, like, ironic or something, because there is nothing sweet about the cliché-ridden introduction of a pouty blonde (Emily Browning) whose evil stepfather dumps her in an asylum after her mother dies and she accidentally kills her sister while trying to defend her from their stepfather. But some of them want to use you and some of them want to abuse you — or, as the case may be, there's nothing but use and abuse in the future, at least for the five days until a fellow turns up who can give the silent girl a lobotomy.

What actually happens in this asylum is never seen — at least not as it happens in the "real" world. Instead, we're swept into an alternate version of events, set in a peculiar brothel that mirrors the situation in the asylum (but with a convenient excuse for false eyelashes and a frequent lack of pants). Here, our nameless heroine is dubbed Babydoll and discovered to have an unexpected talent: When she dances, generally to more gussied-up cover songs, men are utterly enraptured. More importantly for the film (which would like you to believe this is an empowering scenario wherein Babydoll is owning her sexuality),

when she dances, Babydoll shifts into yet another fantastical realm. There, in order to procure the items necessary for escape, she and the other women from the brothel — under the instruction of a mangled-aphorism spouting wise man (Scott Glenn) — must fight zombie steampunk Nazis, orcs, a dragon and some shiny silver robots. They take all kinds of hits, in the manner of video game characters, and have incredible fighting skills (of course, the bad guys all have terrible aim).

In short, shit blows up real good, in a wildly referential, uninspired, hollow sort of manner. The zombie steampunk Nazis might've been cool in a novel by Cherie Priest (*Dreadnought*) or Scott Westerfeld (*Leviathan*). The orcs are straight out of *The Lord of the Rings*, as if Snyder (*300*, *Watchmen*) was pretty sure the Battle of Helm's Deep would be way cooler were it fought by women in miniskirts. Who needs Orlando Bloom skateboarding on a shield?

Is this double rabbit-hole more insulting to the intelligence of the characters or the audience — or both? Either Babydoll is so uncreative that her imagination can only conjure up scenes from poorly written action/adventure films (and, perhaps, *Showgirls*), or we're so spoon-fed and stupid that we require flash, bombast and regurgitated male fantasy imagery in order to consider watching a film in which women stand up to their oppressors and abusers.

It's almost clever, this snide take on moviemaking and the action movie audience's willingness to eat up inane films in which nothing real is ever at stake. It almost works, in a condescending, cocky sort of way. But *Sucker Punch* gives you exactly what it's commenting on while it's making its half-baked comments: thin characters, hyperstylized visuals, clunky dialogue and a ridiculous plot, with a bonus girl-power gloss that's thin as a first coat of paint. Snyder's trying to have his cake and eat it too, and it pulls the teeth from his film — if it had any to begin with. **ew**

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