Who wants Discipline?

The Lords of Discipline, starring David Keith, Robert Prosky, and G.D. Spradlin, directed by Franc Roddam, screenplay by Thomas Pope and Lloyd Fonvielle, Paramount Pictures release.

"The Lords of Discipline" can be compared to football's Pro Bowl. All the talent is present and all the potential for a great ball game is there, but the players and their team seem to have their hearts in the event. When they could have had a touchdown, they settle for a field goal. No one wants to put forth that extra effort to turn something rather humdrum into something special. This movie fails for much the same reasons. Instead of being a hard-hitting story of military life, this film ends up as "Taps Goes to College."

The movie takes place in the early sixties at the Carolina Military Institute, a West Point clone, whose harsh methods of discipline contrast violently with the lush, languorous beauty of Old Charleston. David Keith plays Will McClean, a senior cadet at the Institute, who is called upon to protect a new cadet—a new enemy, although not in the same sense. Instead of being a hard-hitting story of military life, this film ends up as "Taps Goes to College."

The origins of the Ten are shrouded in the myths and legends of the Institute's past. The group is constantly on the prowl, working diligently to eliminate all those whom they deem "unfit" to wear the school ring. Evidence of the organization's power is plentiful. A rather chubbish, rather cowardly young knob has a rather ungainly look. G.D. Spradlin, who won critical acclaim if popukar success in "An Officer and a Gentleman," tries hard to make his down-home Tennessee charm shine through the predictable and confusing dialogue, but he isn't given much of a character to work with, and he isn't enough of a screen presence to carry the film on his personal merits. Veteran character actor Robert Prosky plays the Bear, but the only hint at a characterization of him is that he is supposed to be a tough guy who likes to talk with a cigar wedged in his mouth. G.D. Spradlin has one or two good moments as the Institute's commanding officer, and Rick Rossovich has the best part in the movie as the Bear's brush and brawny roommate. Franc Roddam's direction is smoothly paced, but he just doesn't have anything written into the script. Some scenes go on too long while others aren't developed enough.

The ending came right out of left field and made what occurred earlier in the picture seem even less plausible. Clearly, the problem with "The Lords of Discipline" is that the lack of characterization leaves us indifferent to what the outcome of the story is. As it usually is the case with movies made from books (the film is based on a novel by Pat Conroy), the screenwriters were unable to get a feel for the points the author was trying to convey. The end result is similar to an undercooked steak: very meaty and potentially irresistible, but who wants it?

I just wish they had gone for the touch-down.

Michael C. Magras

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