## arts

## Poor script, brotherly violence flaw 'Riders'

By Jac Versteeg

The Long Riders

The Long Riders is a western filled with brothers. There are enough brothers in The Long Riders, both as characters and as actors, to open a small monastery, and that's what they should have done instead

of making this movie.

The film is about the James-Younger gang and its exploits in Missouri after the Civil War. But this movie has a gimmick. The brothers in the gang are portrayed by real-life brothers. James and Stacy Keach play Jesse and Frank James, David and Keith and Robert Carradine play Cole and Jim and Bob Younger, Dennis and Randy Quaid play Clell and Ed Miller, and Christopher and Robert Guest play Bob and Charley Ford. Brother!

I guess director Walter Hill intended this movie to be a psychological study of violent men (with psychoanalysis provided, perhaps, by Dr. Joyce Brothers), but it turned out instead to be a celebration of gratuitous violence-a paean to pain.

It has been said that we are all brothers beneath the skin, and the brothers in The Long Riders take every opportunity to discover what lies beneath the skins of as many people as possible. During the course of the film the good guys (the robbers) and the bad guys (the cops) kill and maim each other, as well as miscellaneous innocent bystanders, with enthusiasm and regularity.

The violence is spectacular. Either the special effects or expendable stand-ins have been executed with remarkable skill. When bullets rip into arms, legs, abdomens, foreheads, chests, jaws and, in the case of some unfortunate farm animals, jowls, the audience is treated to a slow-motion view of blood exploding with stunning realism from the victim's arteries. The Long Riders seems to operate on the principle that there is art in arteries.

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But what is the use of all this violence? Why, you ask yourself, are these people plugging away at each other? There must be some complex mitigating factors operating deep within the psychological make-up of these characters that explain their violent acts as something other than sheer, stupid sadism. Surely the script will explain.

But no. The unfortunate truth is that there is no complexity in the script. The characters are drawn as simple country folk of limited intelligence. The dialogue is

rendered in rustic macho. When Jesse's girl asks him why he's going to rob another bank, Jesse explains, "Ma needs money to keep the farm goin'. But don't worry. Zee, I'll be comin' back for

ya." He did it for his mother?

When Clell Miller decides to shoot a bank teller who carefully has explained that he prefers not to die because, "I've got a family, Mister," Clell justifies his act by shouting, "Damn Yankee!" before blowing the teller's brains out. He did it for

When Cole Younger's prostitute girlfriend asks him to settle down and marry her because "I just want to find out what it feels like to be respectable," Cole replies, "Respectable? You're a whore. You'll always be a whore. That's why I like ya." He did it because he had a poor selfconcept?

While lying in a prison hospital after being shot 11 times in an escape attempt, Cole Younger assumes the attitude of a frontier philosopher and tells his jailer, "We played a rough game. We lost." He did it because life is a game? Such profundity! Such cliches!

I don't want to give you the idea that The Long Riders is two hours of straight violence. When people are not being killed, the screen is filled with scenes of simple people going about the boring business of

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being bucolic. Where did they get such plain looking people? Are these the extra extras from Coal Miner's Daughter?

I also don't want to give you the idea that there is nothing whatsoever good about this film. Ric Waite's photography is filled with beautiful earth tones and soft, dusky, peaceful images of nature that provide a subtle contrast to the stark violence man brings into the world. And, luckily, in addition to oozing blood the actors somehow manage to exude enough charm to save the film from being completely awful. It's a shame to waste so much talent on such a poor film.

If violence intrigues you, you might want to see The Long Riders. But you can save yourself some money and get the same thrill if you just steal an ax, sneak into a pig sty, and hack up a few swine.

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