

## Comedy? Drama? Split personalities don't mesh

### Gross Anatomy

Matthew Modine, Daphne Zuniga,  
Christine Lahti, Todd Field

directed by Thom Eberhardt

Ram Triple  
967-8284

The story of how five first-year medical students deal with the pressure of medical school and a relentless professor could have been a touching tale of character development. But *Gross Anatomy* fails to delve into the character of its players and proves to be nothing more than an exploration of cadavers, bad lines and poor acting.

Matthew Modine stars as Joe Slovak, a bright, arrogant 26-year-old who enrolls at Chandler University's esteemed school of medicine. Instead of joining his classmates in their fear and nausea, Modine decides to follow his own lesson plan of socializing and romancing. His attitude toward his schoolwork leads to conflict with Professor Rachel Woodruff (Christine Lahti), and his habit of skirt-chasing leads to a meeting with Laurie Rorbach (Daphne Zuniga), a pretty and intense medical student.

Neither relationship is developed adequately, yet the action continues anyway, and the plot unravels.

The main problem with the movie is that the character of Joe Slovak is never given enough attention, and the audience is left guessing as to what is the driving force is inside of

### THOMAS HEALY

film

him. Without this insight, the relationships into which Slovak ventures are as meaningless to the audience as they are to him.

Slovak is viewed by his stressed-out classmates as an irresponsible cut-up. But to Woodruff he is a student with great potential and misdirected

*The audience is left wondering whether it missed something or if the screenplay was poorly written. They can be assured they didn't miss a thing*

energies. Her attempt to mold him into a perfect doctor comprises much of the movie's storyline. She sees his cockiness and insensitivity as reminiscent of her own attitude as a young doctor. Her harsh demands are also influenced by problems in her personal life. These problems are not uncovered until late in the movie, so she comes across as a cold, brutal

professor concerned only with making life miserable for her students.

The relationship between Slovak and Rorbach holds little interest, because neither character evokes any sympathy from the audience. For the first half of the movie, Slovak resembles an obnoxious high school boy pestering a beautiful girl. And Rorbach, for her part, is a snobby, uptight, bookworm who is annoyed by Slovak's antics. Then, for no plausible reason, a spark is ignited and this tiny brush fire is transformed into a conflagration.

Meanwhile, the audience is left wondering whether it missed something or if the screenplay was poorly written. Moviegoers can be assured they did not miss anything.

The portrayal of a first-year medical school class seems distorted as well. The constant banter between the rather immature students is both annoying and suggestive of a fifth grade class. The attempt at comedy contributes to an unrealistic setting. Furthermore, the conflict between teacher and student is overemphasized where no conflict seems justified to exist.

*Gross Anatomy* is a competent exploration of the pressures placed on medical students. The movie illustrates how stress and fear can cause students to lose control of their lives. When conscientious student David Schreiner (Todd Field) resorts to cheating and amphetamines, it is obvious the course load is too much for mere humans. However, *Gross Anatomy* fails to utilize this theme fully and misses a chance to salvage something meaningful from the story.



Matthew Modine and Christine Lahti square off in 'Gross Anatomy'

The movie snags in the trap of trying to be too much to too many people. It touches on conflicts ranging from parental pressure to over-ambitiousness to marriage and school. It raises all these problems and then

drops them in the viewer's lap. Instead of exploring one or two conflicts in depth, it mentions 10 of them in passing. This creates a weak storyline that is not worth the two hours of film it uses.

## Craven's back, but his film just doesn't have the spark

### Shocker

Michael Murphy, Peter Berg,  
Cami Cooper, Mitch Pileggi

directed by Wes Craven

Carolina Blue and White  
942-3061

●● 1/2

*Shocker* is the new film by writer-director Wes Craven. Craven's earlier works include the original *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The*

### MIKE LONG

film

*Serpent and the Rainbow* and a film that few are familiar with, the cult classic *The Last House on the Left*. Craven returns to familiar territory in *Shocker* by filling it with bizarre visuals and dream images.

*Shocker* is a fast-paced action/horror film with a hard-driving, heavy metal soundtrack. The story centers around Horace Pinker and Jonathan

Parker. Pinker (Mitch Pileggi) is a mass-murderer who has been victimizing the town of Maryville, murdering entire families and getting away clean.

Parker (Peter Berg) is the local college football star. Due to a mysterious relationship between himself and the killer, he dreams of the murders before they happen.

Thanks to his power, Parker convinces his father (Michael Murphy), a police lieutenant, that he can find Pinker. Because Parker was responsible for Pinker's arrest and subsequent execution, they become sworn enemies. Pinker is determined to get revenge, even after he is put to death in the electric chair.

The actors do a good job with the material they are given. Relative newcomer Pileggi is fantastic as Pinker. He really turns on the evil, and — unlike the now-comedic Freddy Krueger — there is no way viewers could like this character. Peter Berg as Parker seems to have some trouble with the more emotional scenes, but he handles his physically-demanding role well. Other stand-outs include Michael Murphy, as

Parker's dad, and Richard Brooks, as his friend.

The script of *Shocker* is far from original. It has elements of the films *Trick or Treat*, *Prison*, *The Hidden*, and most especially, the barely-released *The Horror Show*.

Craven has trouble holding the various ideas together and various plot devices are left dangling in the

*Pileggi really turns on the evil — there is no way viewers could like this character*

wind. Less-patient members of the audience will be frustrated by the inconsistency of the movie. The movie's final chase scene, the most exciting part of the film, doesn't make much sense and is never thoroughly explained.

But despite of these shortcomings, Craven's visual sense saves the film. Although it is not truly scary, the movie contains some suspenseful scenes. Craven is the master of tricking the audience with a dream sequence. And if viewers think he is only copying himself from *Elm Street*, they need to check out his earlier work, *Deadly Blessing*.

The film also contains some dazzling special effects. The final chase scene will blow viewers away. Even Pinker's electric-chair burns appear to be real — probably because they were modeled after Ted Bundy's!

Overall, *Shocker* is a disappointment. It's not a bad film, but it's just not Craven at his best. Obviously, the lure of a big contract from Universal/Alive Films made him lose his head. He should go back to his low-budget roots and try again.

Although comparison between the now classic *Elm Street* and *Shocker* is inevitable, they can't really be compared; *Elm Street* is simply much better. But for those who like routine horror films and don't care about the director's past, *Shocker* is worth seeing.

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