



By Trent Drake

This Week's Feature: *Trancers*

I'm shocked. Shaken. Dazed. Stunned. Befuddled. Flabbergasted. F***ed up bigtime.

You see, I just looked up this week's feature flop in *Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1995* (see review, elsewhere) and not only was it in there, but it also got (gasp) a good review!

Damn. Double Damn. And of course, nuts. I'll get over this, I swear it. (Somebody cue up the Micheal Bolton Chorus singing "When I'm Back on my Feet Again.")

Anyway, this week's flick, *Trancers*, is a low-budget sci-fi cult film that has the rare privilege of being well-regarded by critics-- but don't let that turn you off. It's still loaded with cheesy special effects, corny dialogue, time travel and scads of violence.

As Sophia would say, "Picture it! California, 2247." Los Angeles is a scuba diver's paradise thanks to global warming, and what's left is a soybean-fed cyberpunk\gothic cesspool called Angel City. As the film opens, we meet an ultra-tough guy cop named Jack Deth (Tim Thomerson), who helpfully informs us (via narration) that the citizenry has finally been freed of the influence of Martin Whistler (Micheal Stefani), a vicious psychic necromancer who takes over the weak-minded and turns them into zombie slaves. These slaves are known as Trancers.

Having killed Whistler six months ago, Jack is busily tracking down the last of Whistler's zombies. Tired of the monotony of being attacked and nearly murdered every few minutes, Jack quits the force and takes up scuba diving through Lost Angeles. Deth then Deth

receives the unwelcome news that Whistler is alive and well and wiping out the leaders of the city.

But Whistler isn't in the city... not technically, anyway. He's used a consciousness-shifting drug to send his mind 'down the line' to 1985 Los Angeles. Deth is hired to follow him and save the

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ancestors of the Council before Whistler retroactively cancels them. Nasty complications abound: one Councillor has no idea where her ancestor lives, and Whistler's ancestor is a cop. Undaunted (well, maybe a little), Jack destroys Whistler's body and takes the time serum to follow his mind.

He wakes up in L.A. during the Christmas season and does some detective work. With the aid of a cute punk rocker named Lena (Helen Hunt) and a couple of nifty gadgets, Deth eludes Whistler, various deathtraps (Dethtraps?), some really funny Trancers and eventually manages to save the world. Deth gets the girl and lives to do the sequels... much to Leonard Maltin's eternal regret.

Acting (Or Lack Thereof): No flies on this one. Damn it, that's two flicks in a row with good actors. I'm going to have to find some bad actors soon or I'll be a real critic; however, I'd like to single out Thomerson for special honours. He's tough, tender, touching, and unTranceable. He's also damn cool in his trenchcoat and slicked-back hair. Deth lives! Oh, and Stephani's per-

formance as Whistler is slimy and evil... just the way I like my bad guys! I also like the various winos Deth deals with. Hap Ashby (Biff Manard) is particularly fun.

Technical Stuff: There aren't many special effects in this movie, because the bulk of it takes place in modern L.A. But there are a few real goodies. Near the beginning there's a nice shot of a police cruiser floating over a diner. The Angle City sets and matte paintings are pretty good (I love the shot of drowned L.A.). Trancers turn red and evaporate with a nifty sizzling noise when killed. But the most fun is 'The Long Second', a wristwatch with an interesting stopwatch feature. It speeds up Jack's personal time, giving him ten seconds for every one second of real time. The effect is well staged: Jack actually watches a bullet fly by in slow motion; later he uses it to slow... no, that would wreck the ending.

Stuff to Watch For: Let's see... there's the tanning booth of doom... the hilarious attack of the Tranced Santa Claus... Jack watches 'Peter Gunn' and criticizes him for having a dumb name... various people make fun of Jack Deth's name... the incomprehensible 'Jingle Bell Punk' number... Deth beats up a gang of punk rockers... the three wise winos... need I continue?... Deth's neat car... the 'long second' scenes... a cleverly interrupted love scene... stop me, please...

Best Line: "Security? We've got a situation at the North Pole!" A remarkably calm Mrs. Claus.

Bottom Line: Good. Real good. Fun to watch, good plot, good characters, interesting science fiction, makes you think, sort of. I enjoyed it thoroughly, and I'll probably rent the sequels just to see more of this Deth guy.

Next Time: Who knows? I don't.

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