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Starrbooty – a flash needing to be panned!

BY: Neal McKenna, October 3, 2008

Okay, okay! I get it! I get it!! RuPaul's 2007 film, "Starrbooty" is a send-up on all those really bad 60s and 70s American sexploitation and blaxploitation flicks. As the diva repeatedly explained to the audience at The Zone, in Johannesburg: "This film pays homage (say: oh-mah-juh) to directors like Russ Meyer and John Waters." And, to be sure, this latest iteration of the Starbooty franchise, like its predecessors, makes full use of grainy footage, obvious vocal overdubbing and dramatic visual cuts to mimic those old-time, low-budget films.

However, early into the first reel, about half the audience took offence to the very explicit – now infamous – "Russian" scene and tromped out en masse. In the end, those who walked didn't really miss all that much. For those who stayed on, two hours of their lives were frittered away – time they will never get back. The film lacked cleverness, wit and style, both in script and production. – And lest



we forget, the next-to-zero budget really showed! Humour was of the toilet variety and even at that, it was hit-and-miss. The Johannesburg screening of Starrbooty was sponsored by Jo'burg Pride as a fundraiser and was sparsely attended. So, any way you look at it, the evening was pretty much a bomb – and a real dud at that.

As for RuPaul Charles, he/she was having a hissy fit as I entered the vacant auditorium where each member of the invited press was allocated five –

count 'em – five minutes to speak with her Ladyship. "...No, no, no!" Her tone was adamant. "I won't do it! It's my job to look my best and I'm not doing any camera interviews without proper light!" An E-TV camera man is giving her grief. He says: "Let me do my job, lady," perhaps not knowing RuPaul is actually a man. Certainly, he is taking no notice of the fact he is in the presence of a genuine-down-to-the-sequins "international superstar." "...No. Let me do mine," Ru-the-Paul hurls back at him, perfectly shaped nostrils flaring.

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"I just want to do my job," the cameraman repeats.

"No, you are not doing your job if I'm not happy." She/he laughs haughtily. "Don't you get it? **Get it?** Don't you act like a diva, mister! I'm the diva! **I'm** the diva! Jeezus-H-Christ! What's a girl gotta do to get her way around here?" From my front-row seat, I am truly enjoying this show.

The so-called press conference, like the movie in the theatre next door, doesn't seem to be going very well. It is poorly organised and nobody, least of all me, knows what is supposed to be happening. But I wait and I watch but most of all, I capture every word with my handy-dandy microchip recorder! The cameraman glowers into his viewfinder, his lips pressed into a thin, angry line.

The E-TV stand-in reporter begins with: What inspired you to make Starbooty? RuPaul's practiced and slick replies with: "Starrbooty was made in response to the overly-politically correct climate in the United States..." At this point, I have already decided, I don't give a hoot about the questions I had earlier planned to ask. Who cared about her lame reality TV show on some obscure American cable network? My research had already told me it was a drag knock-off of America's Next Top Model. I now had a much better story on the brew.

...But let me step back for a moment to explain something. You see, I was a reporter in the old, old newspaper daze. Therefore, when I see a gap, I strike. For a moment, at this free-for-all "press conference," everybody else seemed to be standing around, waiting for another boom to drop. I make my move. "RuPaul?" I use my best "professional" voice. – At 48 and up-close, the old gal didn't look half bad. Although, one has to speculate that a little nipping and tucking has likely happened over the years between 1960 and the

present. – She/he replies "Yes?" Her tone has that chilly "head school-mistress" ring to it. "Hello," I continue undeterred. "I'm Neal McKenna from Gay Pages magazine and..." Out of nowhere, like a bird of prey, someone named Natasha swoops over to us and says: "There's an order here!" She glares at me. "You'll have to wait your turn!"

"Oh, sorry," I apologise. "I didn't know. Nobody told me..." I again take my place in the front row and watch.

RuPaul continues to look sour in her over-the-top frizzy-blond Afro wig. So much for her obviously-cultivated, friendly and approachable, "love-one-another" demeanour! Lights go up, SABC 3 cameras start rolling and the wicked bitch of the west – remember, she's a California girl – transforms into Glinda, good witch of the American east coast. Sweetness and light prevail. Before I know it, SABC is done and it's my turn. This time, our diva is très genteel. I prattle on about being a fan – after all, more than RuPaul can play the insincere game – and play it well. I ask my dumb questions, knowing I'll never use her answers. I ask her how long she will be staying in SA and suggest she visit the Cradle of Humankind. She almost seems interested. And, in my mind's eye, I can see her down in the narrow depths of the caves, in the dirt, on her hands and knees, wearing gold lamé spandex and those spike heels! The image still warms my heart.

Then, it was time to rejoin my partner, who was unhappily parked in the theatre, struggling though the screening of Starrbooty. Like troopers, we stayed on through to the end of the movie, but a passing parade of viewers had made wiser decisions. In all, the Starrbooty South African premiere was an entertaining evening out – but not for any of the anticipated reasons! <