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Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies

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When Thelma and Louise outfought the men who had tormented them, women across America discovered what male fans of action movies have long known-the empowering rush of movie violence. Yet the duo's escapades also provoked censure across a wide range of viewers, from conservatives who felt threatened by the up-ending of women's traditional roles to feminists who saw the pair's use of male-style violence as yet another instance of women's co-option by the patriarchy. In the first book-length study of violent women in movies, "Reel Knockouts" makes feminist sense of violent women in films from Hollywood to Hong Kong, from top-grossing to direct-to-video, and from cop-action movies to X-rated skin flicks. Contributors from a variety of disciplines analyse violent women's respective places in the history of cinema, in the lives of viewers, and in the feminist response to male violence against women. The essays in part one, "Genre Films," turn to film cycles in which violent women have routinely appeared. The essays in part two, "New Bonds and New Communities," analyse movies singly or in pairs to determine how women's movie brutality fosters solidarity amongst the characters or their audiences. All of the contributions look at films not simply in terms of whether they properly represent women or feminist principles, but also as texts with social contexts and possible uses in the re-construction of masculinity and femininity. Martha McCaughey, author of "Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense", is Associate Professor of Women's Studies in the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Tech. Neal King, author of "Heroes in Hard Times: Cop Action Movies in the U.S." is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Belmont University in Nashville.

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