



Double Dare

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**"Two Women Who Take The Physical Challenge Everyday"
(Awesome) ****1/2**

You ever hear the one about why stuntwomen need less padding than the males? Me either. Although it sounds like a crude, sexist joke there's a simple truth to it that in many ways sums up the struggle that women have had in this profession. Why anyone, man or woman, would subject themselves to some of the physical torture inflicted upon them is one for the adrenaline junkies out there. *Double Dare* is not about that though, nor is it some bare-fisted indictment of the industry. It's about two stuntwomen who love their job and Amanda Micheli's terrific documentary captures their joy on the job while shedding some light on their struggle to keep them.

Jeannie Epper was born into the business. Her father was a stuntman, doubling for the likes of Gary Cooper and Errol Flynn. The family legacy is summed up perfectly by **Steven Spielberg**'s assertion that during the filming of *1941*, "*there was Eppers flying all over the place.*" One of her longest running gigs was as **Lynda Carter**'s doppelganger on *Wonder Woman*, one of the first serious ass-kickin' women on television and a major coup for those who once had to watch men dress up as women to take the fall in movies. **Zoe Bell** is the new generation. At the age of 18 she got the prime gig as **Lucy Lawless**' double on the wildly popular *Xena: Warrior Princess*. If the truth to the safety padding question is in any doubt, just imagine where you put the pads when a third of your femininity is exposed for the sexiness factor. That's right, almost nowhere. Flown through the air and harnessed up with wires nearly cutting off the circulation to your crotch, a few things are going to hurt. But the hardest place to fall is when your character is killed off after six years and its time to find another job.

It's at this crossroads in these two women's lives that they find each other. Jeannie, now in her 60s has dealt with the possibility of cosmetic surgery, ironically a facelift for the practically faceless on screen. Zoe is still young and a barrel of life so enthusiastic it seems impossible to wipe the smile from her face. So when it does at one point, we feel for her anguish and root for her to get back on her feet. Jeannie in the interim from finding work has fought for the rights for women to make a living in this business and was instrumental in getting the first ever "World Stunt Awards" show off the ground. New Zealander Zoe, meanwhile, is enjoying her first time in Hollywood while the potential next chapter of her life is just peeking around the corner.

Stuntwork is an amazing way to live one's life. The approach Jeannie and Zoe take to it doesn't go by the way of someone just looking for the next rush to fill a void in their lives. It's more akin to a child looking up at that new rollercoaster and then laughing all the way down the hill. It's certainly dangerous and both have suffered their share of black-and-blue marks, but know it or not they're doing it for us as much as them. We can sit back safe in our chairs and go "wow", possibly even feeling a little of that adrenaline as they perform a high jump or backflip away from a sword. *Double Dare* captures that excitement during not just actual stunts, but in training sessions and behind-the-scenes footage that intimately provide us with perhaps an extra shot the next time we see an action sequence.

Documentaries need fascinating subjects, but also ones that you want to spend 90 minutes with. Go look up Jeannie's resume at IMDB.com and you'll see a fascinating career. Watch Zoe in *Double Dare* and try to sell me that you don't want to spend more time with her after the documentary is over. As individuals, either of them would be able to fill 90 minutes. Together, there's a richer magic at work, as these women have been known as nothing more than bodies their whole life. Now we get to see their faces and their smiles. At last, they are the stars in a film as fascinating as any narrative you're likely to see. Jeannie is still in the game, Zoe is just getting started and Amanda Micheli has crafted an exciting, funny and ultimately touching documentary that strips away the padding, gets us inside these women's lives to the point where we want to be there to catch them when they fall.

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