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## It's a hard-knock life for 'Double Dare' pair

### DOUBLE DARE ★★★

(Not rated: language, some sexual content)

**Starring:** Jeannie Epper, Zoe Bell.

**Director:** Amanda Micheli.

**Running time:** 1 hr. 21 min.

**Playing:** Laemmle's Sunset 5 in West Hollywood.

**In a nutshell:** Two stuntwomen negotiate male-dominated Hollywood in this marvelous documentary.

By Glenn Whipp | Film Critic

HOLLYWOOD stunt work is, to quote the Godfather of Soul, a man's, man's, man's world. But as we see in Amanda Micheli's entertaining, illuminating documentary, "Double Dare," there's a place for women, too, provided they've got the emotional and

physical toughness needed to absorb the body shots and ego bruises along the way.

Micheli, a rugby player whose first film explored the Women's Professional Rodeo circuit, has both the good sense and good fortune to have chosen two fascinating, passionate stuntwomen to profile. What begins as parallel stories turns into a touching mentor-student relationship (thanks, apparently, to an introduction by Micheli), making "Double Dare" a nice tale of well-earned sisterhood.

Jeannie Epper is the veteran, her family having been in the business for four generations. She doubled for Lynda Carter on "Wonder Woman," slid down muddy embankments for Kathleen Turner in "Romancing the Stone," and has worked for scores of top filmmakers, including Steven Spielberg, who sings her

praises in an interview.

Now in her 60s and a grandmother four times over, Epper struggles against Hollywood ageism and sexism. Most stunt workers her age have moved on to become stunt coordinators or assistant directors. Epper finds it hard to break into that circle. Besides that, she's not anxious to give up stunt work. She loves the physicality of the job. "I don't think I could be a waitress," she muses.

On the flip side is Zoe Bell, a young New Zealander who worked as Lucy Lawless' double for three years on "Xena: Warrior Princess." When the show ends, Bell comes to Hollywood looking for work. Her job hunt, chronicled over a couple of years, is nothing short of remarkable. To say more would ruin a wonderful surprise.

Micheli has a good eye for telling details and a strong empathy for the pressures women face in the industry. When Epper and a friend visit a plastic surgeon for a liposuction consultation, it's positively heartbreaking to watch a woman — a true legend in the business — being forced to contemplate an invasive procedure simply to be able to scrounge up an odd job here and there.

But the movie doesn't dwell on the negative, and these women certainly don't want our sympathy. Epper and Bell are class acts, genuine human beings who are a pleasure to watch in action. Their story is inspiring, even if you have no desire to make it in the movie business.

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