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DOUBLE DARE

by Eric Campos

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★★★★★

2004, Un-rated, 100 Minutes,

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This multi-generational true story takes us inside the lives of two women on opposite sides of the world, both struggling to keep their careers going as they have each come to a crossroads. Jeannie Epper and Zoe Bell are stuntwomen and they'll have to face scarier challenges than taking a high fall or flipping a car during a high speed chase. They'll have to jump through countless rings of fire with Satan hot on their tail. That's right, they'll have to deal with the entertainment business.

Jeannie Epper, a grandmother in her 60s, comes from a long line of stunt professionals. The Eppers are highly regarded in the movie industry. The name may not be familiar to you, but if you enjoy movies on a regular basis, you've more than likely seen an Epper flying through the air or running down the street ablaze. Jeannie alone has doubled leading ladies in countless films and television shows, most notably Lynda Carter's double as Wonder Woman. She's also appeared in "Romancing the Stone," "Robocop," "The Blues Brothers," "Blade Runner," "Blade"...the list is endless...she's even appeared as a bar brawler in "Road House." What a woman! I'd be proud to have my ass kicked by her any day.

But as versatile as Jeannie has been in the business and despite the respect her family receives, she's finding it difficult to keep working in the field that she's loved for her entire life due to Hollywood growing younger and younger and herself getting older. As Jeannie's story unfolds, we watch her hustle her ass off for whatever stunt work she can get, struggling not only with sexism, but ageism within the industry. It sucks to see someone struggling so much when they deserve to be treated like royalty.

Zoe Bell, a woman in her twenties living in New Zealand, got her first break doubling Lucy Lawless as Xena the Warrior Princess. But when the show shoots its final episode, Zoe's future is up in the air. So she packs her bags and heads to the U.S. where she finds Hollywood to be an ice cold bucket of water to the face. She hangs in there, though, and with some mentoring from Jeannie, ends up landing the gig as Uma Thurman's stunt double in "Kill Bill."

The first half of the film parallels these two women's lives as they fight their own battles pushing uphill to that next plateau of their lives, revealing the many difficulties women face in not only the stunt profession, but in the entertainment business as well. But during the second half of the documentary, when Zoe makes a home for herself in the States and has Jeannie as a coach, the film goes into fight back mode as these two women reveal what immense strength lies in self-confidence and perseverance.

Thrilling stunt footage aside, this is a film that celebrates the strength of women in the entertainment industry and these two separate stories are tied together perfectly by filmmaker Amanda Micheli. A wealth of inspiration this film is.

