

Skin Deep ★½

Year of Release: 1989

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: Skip It

One of my favorite songs by the Stranglers includes the lyric, "You'd better watch out for the skin deep." I'd like to extend the same warning: watch out for *Skin Deep*, but whatever you do don't watch *Skin Deep*.

Skin Deep is a tedious and uneven comedy written and directed by Blake Edwards. John Ritter stars as Zach, a dried-up writer and insatiable womanizer with a big-time drinking problem. I never saw Edwards' comedy *The Man Who Loved Women*, but I have to wonder whether *Skin Deep* is a remake. You see, to put it mildly, Zach goes to bed with just about each and every woman he meets. As the movie opens, Zach's wife, Alex, catches him with not only his mistress but also his mistress' hairdresser. Like any sensible wife, Alex kicks Zach out of the house and divorces him. In response, Zach goes on a spiritual journey of drinking, womanizing, psychotherapy, and self-discovery. If you're turned on by the idea of watching Ritter drink, get arrested, have sex, drink, crash his Mercedes, have more sex, drink, get arrested again, drink, and sing horrendously at the piano, then *Skin Deep* should be right up your alley.

Skin Deep makes the fatal mistake of inflicting on us unbelievable and unsympathetic characters. Zach is a rich, '80s L.A. version of Ritter's Jack Tripper character from "Three's Company." Like Jack, Zach is clumsy and inept; he's the type of guy whose bad aim makes him accidentally squirt breath freshener into his eye. Zach is supposed to be charming and charismatic, but I failed to see even one redeeming virtue in him. Consequently, I never felt the least bit of sympathy or pity for the philandering alcoholic during his moments of crisis. In fact, when Zach crashes his ex-wife's wedding in a desperate attempt to stop her from remarrying, I actually rooted for her to go through

with the ceremony.

To add insult to injury, Edwards gives his large supporting cast nothing but stereotypes with which to work. For instance, Vincent Gardenia's talents are wasted in his role as the fatherly bartender. Of all the women in the film—and there are many—Alyson Reed, alone, stands out as Zach's wife; Reed brings intelligence and sensitivity to the role.

Because we don't care the slightest bit about anyone in *Skin Deep*, the film's few feeble attempts at drama inevitably fail. The comedy in *Skin Deep* doesn't fare much better. Most of the jokes are dumb, predictable, and sitcomish. About every ten minutes, however, Edwards does manage to come up with a good line or a novel sight-gag, the most effective of which involves a pair of "dueling" condoms. Overall, the laughs in *Skin Deep* are just too infrequent and the characters just too shallow for the film to stay afloat.

My final criticism of the film lies in its glamorous depiction of alcohol and alcoholism. Zach's excessive drinking is clearly ruining his life, but nevertheless it seems to give him more pleasure than pain. Zach's drinking binges never have any truly serious or lasting consequences. If he crashes his Mercedes, he gets a new one. If he gets arrested, his lawyer bails him out of jail. If his wife leaves him, she will eventually decide to give him a second chance if he'll clean up his act. The tone in *Skin Deep* is all wrong; Edwards treats a very serious issue far too lightly, making a joke out of a problem that is no joking matter. Perhaps Edwards should have studied Dudley Moore in *Arthur* or, better yet, Michael Keaton in *Clean and Sober* before making *Skin Deep*.

If I were you, I'd heed the advice of the Stranglers.