

# Tank Girl

**Directed by Rachel Talalay; Starring Lori Petty, Malcolm McDowell.**

Tank Girl is a spunk. She is the ultimate fantasy chick: sexy, aggressive, cynically sadistic, and, ultimately, in control of a large piece of machinery. Any fantasy elements not included in Tank Girl are present in Jet girl, so that no-one feels left out. The whole idea of Tank Girl would be a lot more subversive if the entire thing wasn't the creation of two men. As it is, in comic form, it is still a long way from the mainstream.

So I was very excited when I heard that Tank Girl had made it to the screen. I thought it meant that it was finally possible to create films based around an alternative premise, show them in commercial cinemas, and retain credibility.

How naive I was. I should have expected what I got: a mainstream movie. In fact, *Tank Girl* was so clichéd, and so often failed to reflect any of the original Tank Girl-ness, that when the film actually reverted to cartoon-like interludes, they possessed more intensity, humour and subversion than any of the live action bits.

*Tank Girl* is actually a shocking reflection of how the commercial film industry can kill independent and original thought. For example, in the comic, Tank Girl is a vigilante, vaguely on the side of good, who gets into scrapes, and uses her witty arrogance and, one would believe, subliminal feminine charm, to always come

through in the end. Most comic-book characters are made more interesting by the stuff we don't know about them. Just why, for instance, does Judge Dredd continue to see validity in upholding the law when all of his best mates have long ago been blown to bits, and it's patently obvious to everyone that all those in positions of power are corrupt. We are more interested because we can fill in the dark, blank bits ourselves, turning Dredd or Tank Girl into agents of our own fantasies.

However, in the film, Tank Girl becomes the agent of revenge. For this revenge to seem relevant, and credible to the film's audience, she is given a history, à la Mad Max. But whereas Max goes mad, Tank Girl gets neither more directed, thoughtful or clever. The action serves only to provide her with more gags, while all the real work is done by Jet and the Rippers. In fact, as the film progresses, Tank herself simply becomes more vapid and irrelevant. I think this is in direct contrast to the point of the original Tank Girl idea. In the comic strip, the action was meant to define the character, because the assumption is that you don't need to know the whole Tank Girl history to get into the action, and to have to make the entire life of Tank Girl relevant in each story

is impossible. Therein lies the difference between a film and comic strip; one is ongoing, while one stands alone, with its 90 minute interpretation, for eternity.

This leads me to my second point of contention with this film, and, unfortunately, many of its ilk. A lot of films made from comic strips are essentially wasted opportunities. The chance exists for the film makers to bring to the screen some of the elements that have made the comic so interesting. Tank Girl is not really a main stream comic. Yet *Tank Girl* is a main stream film. It has a conventional narrative and structure as it follows Tank Girl through her adventures. The film looks normal: apart from the all too short animated bits, the direction is too conventional.

Tank Girl the comic may simply be the grunge response to Snow White, but if so the film is even less. It possesses absolutely none of the attitude of the comic, and for me this is a tremendous crime. There are good films about determined women, stories of women on the wrong side of the law, or fighting against the odds. There are also good films based on comic strips, that do justice to both mediums. The only hope for Tank Girl was for the commercial cinema. It has done neither, and now we must await the next one to be released, Judge Dredd, to see if they can get it right.

**GARY POWER**

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# Media Law in Australia

**by Mark Armstrong, David Lindsay and Ray Watterson; Oxford University Press, 1995; 3rd edn; 307 pp; \$32.95 softcover.**

'The media is a map searching for a territory' said J.G. Ballard author of *Empire of the Sun* and *Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan*. Anyone watching, or involved in, the media's frantic struggle to fill the spaces between advertisements must recognise the truth of his diagnosis. Long gone are the days when BBC news announcers, dressed in tails, would play classical music if they thought there was nothing worth reporting.

Now, in our 'information society', the media in all its proliferations has become an elemental force. It drives public opinion and make those nominally in power tremble before its om-

nipotence. The law, always aiming to tame the untameable and reduce the irreducible, lags behind, panting like a three legged dog.

Even three legged dogs can bite, however, and those who work in, or deal with the media need legal guidance. In Australia they can turn to two books, *The Law of Journalism* (Sally Walker, Law Book Company, 1989) or the book under review, *Media Law in Australia*.

*Media Law in Australia* is broad in scope, including chapters on the legal context of media law, advertising, promotions and competitions, and ownership of the media along with central topics such as defamation, contempt

and copyright. The various regulatory bodies such as the press council and the film censorship board are also discussed. *Media Law in Australia* is written in a clear and conversational style, without compromising its quality. A person with an interest in media could gain a comprehensive overview by reading the book from cover to cover rather than just turning to it as a reference for a particular problem.

Cases and legislation are, as far as possible, left out of the main text. However *Media Law in Australia* is fully referenced, with extensive endnotes. This leaves the text uncluttered, but forces the reader into gymnastics if they wish to keep track of dates, etc.

*The Law of Journalism in Australia* is written more as a textbook, with a detailed analysis of the relevant legal

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