

## Living Flesh

While the original Spanish title of the new Pedro Almodovar film, *Carne Tremula*, might be more decorously translated as something like "Tremulous Skin," the fact is that the title *Living Flesh* probably better suits the rawer nature of this lively new outrage from the Madrid goofball director.

The plot (taken from a Ruth Rendell crime novel but utterly transformed) is barely subject to synopsis; suffice it to say this is a fandango for five, a quintet of Quixotes tilting at that old Windmill of Love. Crudely put, young stud Victor (Liberto Rabal) makes a move on druggy/diplomatic brat Elena (Francesca Neri) but gets involved in a murky shoot-out with two testy plain clothes cops, David (Javier Bardem) and his partner Sancho (José Sancho), whose wife Clara (Angela Molina) is two-timing him.

In the aftermath, Victor gets jail time, David is left a paraplegic (although he becomes a champion wheelchair athlete) but marries the guilt-ridden Elena, and Clara continues to wander. Once released, Victor semi-stalks Elena (for revenge? love?) but also gets involved with Clara who harbors a long-simmering secret from Sancho...

See what I mean? Just assume that the film is complicated; the pleasure is in Almodovar's perverse choreography. Filmgoers should be aware that the film's "R" rating for sexulaity is well deserved, since there are scenes of heated carnality ("carne tremula," remember?. It is also shocking in both its bursts of action and in its corkscrew twists. While humor pops through--out of situations, not funny lines--it does not have that off-the-wall nuttiness that some of the director's other films (viz. *Women on the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown*) possess.

Almodovar himself says *Live Flesh* is "the most disquieting film I have made until now," and while that may be true, it is also wholly satisfying--if one goes in the right mood and is ready for some cinematic intensity. It has moments that are likely to stick with you.

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