

'Atomic Blonde' delivers incredible action with routine spy story

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 28 July 2017 01:04



Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 115 min.

It has been a decent month at the movies, with several solid titles being released over the past week. *Atomic Blonde* isn't the best of the bunch and suffers from a lack of emotional investment in the character, but it does provide a few excellent moments of popcorn thrills and a charismatic lead, which help elevate it over a fairly humdrum plotline.

Set in 1989, Lorraine Broughton (Charlize Theron) is a British agent with MI6 sent to Berlin to investigate the murder of another agent. She's met by station chief Percival (James McAvoy) and informed that the killing may have had something to do with a list of spies and double agents that an informant wants to smuggle out to the West.

With the Berlin Wall on the brink of being torn down, tensions are rising between parties on both sides of the city who all have something to hide. Broughton attempts to find the person and help them across the border.

As mentioned, this highly-stylized action flick benefits from a compelling lead in Theron. While the character is hard-boiled, she's still likable, even when she seems as much at home with beating the hell out of people as with manipulation and seduction. It's a good deal of fun to watch her interact with fellow agent Percival, a decidedly slimier individual whose motivations are a bit more mysterious. The two bicker and play well off of each other.

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This is a self-consciously 80s movie and they don't hold back with the references, which is both a blessing and a curse. Visually, it features a lot of neon, particularly across the West Berlin sections of town. It adds some punch and contrast to the grey, dimmer East Berlin areas, although at times this glossiness is a bit over-the-top.

Also, the constant streaming of 80s tunes that tie in with the events occurring onscreen feel a bit forced and artificial. I'm a fan of some of this music, but even I was getting a bit tired of the jukebox score and wishing for a more traditional score.

Clearly, the movie's highlights are the action bits, much of which are captured in long takes (they're augmented at times through some digital trickery, but are impressive nonetheless).

There's an incredible sequence late in the second act involving an attempt to get the contact out of East Berlin; the action moves from the streets into an apartment complex and through a stairwell. This extremely exaggerated hand to hand battle features remarkable choreography with the lead partaking in all kinds of elaborate, bone-crunching moves. Amusingly, these characters won't go down easily, even after being shot, impaled and tossed down staircases. It's all expertly shot and handled.

But what is less effective is the plotting. There isn't much that's new to this spy tale and by the time the movie decides to unravel the hidden incentives and reasons behind the switches in loyalty, it does begin to veer into silliness.

Yet, despite all of the underhanded dealings, the events themselves don't prove to be all that memorable. In all likelihood, there's a twist or two too many present. And perhaps as written, the characters just don't resonate as much as they could.

Still, that's not to say that *Atomic Blonde* isn't enjoyable. When its lead is taking on various bad guys (particularly during that lengthy sequence), it's fantastic to watch.

Those looking for a bit of action escapism will likely be entertained by what they see. If only the same kind of attention had been paid to the characters and the story, this could have been a

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classic. Instead, don't expect the details to stay with you too long after the credits begin to roll.

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