

'The Hitman's Bodyguard' brings scattershot action, laughs

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 118 min.

Movies like this are very tricky to rate. *The Hitman's Bodyguard* is an over-the-top, completely chaotic buddy picture. In fact, it's a bit of a jumble, although one that is bolstered to some degree by its two engaging leads. There are a few good laughs and the film ends with an impressively and entertainingly exaggerated climax. Whether that compensates for an awkward opening act and numerous flat moments along the way will ultimately depend on the viewer.

Michael Bryce (Ryan Reynolds) is a down-on-his-luck bodyguard, struggling to get on with his life after losing a client and his protection agency business in a disastrous fashion. Darius Kincaid (Samuel L. Jackson) is a notorious hitman who agrees to testify against sinister Belarusian leader Vladislav Dukhovich (Gary Oldman) before the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Of course, Interpol's efforts to get their witness there are immediately met with violence and gunfire. As a last resort, Bryce is assigned to get Kincaid from Manchester, England to the courtroom in The Hague in one piece. Naturally, the pair have an adversarial history that adds to the tension during the trip.

The film has a very rough opening act that doesn't work well. There's both an attempt to introduce the villain of the piece as a violent and intimidating mass murderer, mixed with dopey gags involving a depressed and dejected Bryce using a juice bottle as a urinal. It's a weird grouping of tonally varied moments that doesn't create a consistent tone. The photography also leaves something to be desired, with early sections looking excessively dim and gauzy in appearance. Clearly, this isn't a big budget affair, but the fuzzy look of the film does it no favors.

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To be frank, I had almost completely checked out of the movie a half an hour in, but events do begin to improve. When Bryce and Kincaid are thrown together and forced to interact with one another on a personal level, the bickering and verbal jabs begin to hit more efficiently. Events soon become more outrageous and the increasingly sillier bits of action and dialogue hit the mark more often. Jackson excels at poking fun at Reynolds’ character and the latter’s exasperation at his assignment earn some chuckles. There’s also an amusing little blood-drenched bar room flashback (featuring Salma Hayek) that earns a good laugh.

While the stars are all more than capable at performing action, early bits aren’t as dynamic as they should be. It’s also unfortunate that villain Dukhovich isn’t offered the opportunity to interact much with the leads, instead sending thugs to be wiped out. However, when the cast arrive in the Netherlands, the filmmakers do present two entertaining action scenes. There’s an impressive chase along the canals of Amsterdam and an outrageous climactic confrontation in a hardware store. The final thirty minutes mix laughs and brutality far more deftly than in earlier parts of the picture. In fact, the later scenes involve all kinds of collateral damage and feel more reminiscent of a postposterous 80s action picture, lightening the mood considerably.

In the end, there is about one half of a fun little B-action movie in *The Hitman’s Bodyguard*. Heck, on my way home I wasn’t even sure if I liked it enough to recommend it. Truthfully, while it does have its moments thanks to both leads and ends strong, it isn’t nearly as sharp as other action/comedies in their resumes. Action film fans looking for a fix will likely find the material diverting enough, but others may want to wait and catch up with the film on disc or online.

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