Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 100 minutes

Remember schoolyard games from childhood like Red Rover and Simon Says? This week sees the release of a film that details the intricacies of a similar game played by the same friends for several decades. Based on a true story (yep, this film is actually based on real events), *Tag* tells this bizarre tale of grown adults chasing each other around like little kids. It doesn't all work, but when the movie is focused on the game itself, it comes to life.

Hogan (Ed Helms) is one of these pals, who explains the rules of the game and the fact that it is played for one single month a year (specifically May). Almost anything goes, and we see so as the lead does his best to tag his friends who all live in other cities around the country. They include Bob (Jon Hamm), Randy (Jack Johnson) and Sable (Hannibal Buress). As the four reunite, they learn the real motivation for Hogan getting a head start on proceedings... catching Jerry (Jeremy Renner), a fitness guru who has never been tagged, is about to be married and is going to retire from the game at the end of the month.

What is funny to one person can be a completely head-scratching endeavor to another. This film is helped tremendously by the simple absurdity of the actions on display. While the players' styles are different, the extremes that they're all willing to go to "not lose" are indisputable and add a certain amount of demented fun to the proceedings. Jerry, ready to defend himself from any sort of attack, has made preparing himself for any attempted tag a way of life, almost resolving to live in seclusion for one month a year and surround himself with equipment out of a James Bond adventure. The many confrontations also allow for some effective physical comedy as the leads throw themselves at each other.

It results in some amusing moments as each tries to avoid being tagged, sometimes causing property damage, or even throwing objects (and occasionally children) at their pursuers in order to get away. The stakes might not really be life and death here, but thankfully the characters treat the game like it is. Another amusing comedic move is to use voice-overs. Viewers hear the inner thoughts of these friends and see their actions in slow-motion during a few confrontations. Admittedly, it's hilarious to see the expressions of the players change from the joy of believing that they're about to succeed, to confusion and horror as they come to the realization that their plan is falling apart.

Admittedly, not all of it works. There are plenty of supporting characters and a few, like Hogan's very intense, strangely supportive wife Anna (Isla Fisher) certainly add more to the proceedings. However, there are some other superfluous moments that don't hit the right chord. One bit involving a character desperate to join the troupe doesn't really end up going anywhere significant, as do a few other threads and scenes that take place outside of the game itself.

As dopey as it all might be, the movie eventually adds some seriousness to the proceedings and justifies the shenanigans by suggesting the activity keeps the friends in contact and involved in one another's lives (with the exception of Jerry, who, because of his success, has now begun to feel like an outsider within the group). It's all a bit corny, but the cast are likable enough that they ultimately manage to sell this more heartfelt material.

Make no mistake, *Tag* is incredibly goofy and may be something of a guilty pleasure for many. However, the intensity and high energy in which the silly, juvenile game is played ultimately won this viewer over and created a sense of energy and playfulness in the film. Several bits along the way may miss the mark, but when the game itself is on, this movie thumps, jumps and eventually tackles out some big laughs.

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