

'The Upside' features two charismatic stars delivering less-than-stellar material

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

Running Time: 125 minutes

This week sees the release of the comedy/drama *The Upside*. For those who don't know, it's actually a remake of the 2011 French film

The Intouchables

, which broke box office records in Europe, won various awards and was on the Academy shortlist for Best Foreign Language Film.

Unlike the original, though, this effort isn't going to end up showered with honors. Still, it isn't a complete write-off, courtesy of the onscreen work between the movie's two charismatic leads.

Dell (Kevin Hart) is an unemployed hustler with a criminal record who lacks motivation. Forced to go to job interviews, but having no real desire to be hired, the protagonist fumbles his way through a cattle call for a caregiver position at the home of wealthy quadriplegic writer Phillip (Bryan Cranston).

Dell is quickly hired, simply because the ex-con doesn't behave in a patronizing manner toward the author. This all comes much to the chagrin of Phillip's secretary Yvonne (Nicole Kidman), who is concerned Dell's lack of experience will result in tragedy.

An unlikely friendship grows between the two men as they spend more and more time together.

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The humor is scattershot early on as the characters are introduced and Dell attempts to adjust to his new position as live-in caretaker.

Some bits are funny, including the lead's blunt assertions and comments to Phillip. But other gags are forced and difficult to buy into. These include a section involving the protagonist reacting in shock to the fact that he will have to help Phillip use the toilet, and an extended scene that features the horrified employee applying a catheter.

Scenes like these and other traits of the characters can't help but make one feel the stereotyping on display could have been eliminated.

As the film progresses and the two become more comfortable with one another, their discussions and bickering earn a few chuckles. The performers appear to be enjoying each other's company, and in some cases, their enthusiasm alone helps push viewers through the more awkward material.

A sequence that involves Dell attempting to take up painting results in a fun, if not unexpected, sting later on in the picture.

As a drama, everything is "by the numbers." And while a romantic subplot does result in an uncomfortable moment during a social get together, most of the material is about as predictable as it gets.

While Hart and Cranston do their best to sell the material, most will be well ahead of this story as it unravels. The message hammered repeatedly is that these two men become bolder, better people with each other's support and encouragement.

The intent is certainly nice, but it isn't exactly the stuff of great drama.

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So yes, *The Upside* is well intentioned and there are bits and pieces here and there that work. Additionally, audiences unfamiliar with the source material may not react with as much skepticism as this reviewer.

Yet one can't help but think the end product could have been stronger if it had been more daring and not ended up taking the easy route by resorting to comic-set pieces and sentimentality.

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