Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Thursday, 18 July 2019 23:26



Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 105 minutes

Remember action films from the ‘80s that featured a brawny tough guy mowing down countless enemies through city streets and elaborate backdrops? The new comedy *Stuber* certainly does, pay some homage to the genre, while deconstructing it and playing a few tropes for laughs. Admittedly, there are a few tonal imbalances and it took this reviewer a while to get onto the movie’s wavelength. However, this feature improves as it progresses and results in some enjoyable popcorn summer entertainment.

Stu (Kumail Nanjiani) is a nice-guy Uber driver who is underappreciated by co-workers, and can’t seem to attract the romantic attention of Becca (Betty Gilpin), a friend with whom he’s planning on starting a new business. Vic Manning (Dave Bautista) is a tough, blunt, and obsessive cop still reeling from a case gone wrong. When a big lead arrives, Vic decides to follow it up despite the fact that he’s just completed a laser eye surgery procedure. The cop hires Stu and insists that the Uber driver take him to various dangerous spots as he attempts to find the criminals. Bickering ensues as the pair must deal not only with violent killers, but Vic’s estranged artist daughter, Nicole (Natalie Morales).

Admittedly, the opening sequence may not start the movie on the right foot. It’s well shot and

edited, but feels significantly different in tone than the rest of the film. While the scene establishes the main threat, it is quite violent and may confuse viewers expecting a wacky comedy. However, as Stu and his meek personal trials are introduced, the film picks up momentum. And as the visually impaired Vic pushes (or essentially, kidnaps and threatens), the unwilling protagonist into chauffeuring him through the LA criminal underworld and partakes in nasty showdowns, the movie becomes much funnier.

There are violent moments and many bodies left in the wake of the action; in fact, there seem to be so many killings that it quickly becomes clear the cast and director Michael Dowse (*Goon*) are actually poking fun at the over-the-top brutality witnessed in many American buddy cop films. Examples include a bloody gun battle at a well populated animal hospital, a wince-inducing fight at a sporting goods store, and another exaggerated shootout at a Sriracha hot sauce factory.

Besides using bizarre locations to set its physical confrontations, the movie also has fun with other action-movie tropes. Movies of this sort sometimes lead their characters to grimy locales like strip clubs as they follow the trail of the villain. In this case, they find themselves interviewing suspects at a male strip club (where Stu also asks an employee for some romantic advice).

Of course, the most important element is the interplay between the very different lead characters. The movie ultimately succeeds in this department thanks to the work of Nanjiani and Bautista. Vic is a blunt and forceful tough guy who, deep down, really needs a good cry and to process his feelings. And Stu has to come clean about his personal relationships and be more assertive in his own life. It’s an amusing contrast as the characters argue, resulting in plenty of panicked quips from Stu (both about being put into danger and his flailing Uber rating).

Yes, the movie ultimately arrives at a destination that you might expect, sections feel a bit loose and improvisational, and there are a few gags that don’t quite hit the mark. Still, *Stuber* does deliver plenty of laughs, if you know where to look and give the story and characters the opportunity to get up to full speed. This is a violent, but amusing buddy movie, that also provides a few spins on genre clichés.

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