

Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time:
90 minutes

This film is opening Aug. 21 at open movie theaters. Streaming options have yet to be announced.

While most know actor Russell Crowe over the years for his dramatic endeavors (that have earned him three Oscar nominations and one win for *Gladiator*), it appears that every once in a while the actor also enjoys having a little fun. That’s perhaps a strange thing to say about the genre picture *Unhinged*, which consists of an hour and a half of glowering from its tortured villain between scenes of violent physical assaults and car crashes. However, it’s very clear from the outset that this film is an over-the-top genre picture and its central goal is not to delve into broken psyches, but instead dispatch a few pulpy jolts.

Rachel (Caren Pistorius) is a frazzled woman dealing with a tense divorce, work issues and numerous family commitments. While driving her son Andy (Jimmi Simpson) to school, she finds herself stuck behind an SUV frozen at a green light. Angry, she honks, only to have the unnamed driver (played by Crowe) start a conversation with her at the next light. A heated

exchange follows, with Rachel unaware that the man has just had a violent and psychotic episode.

The driver follows the mother and son through the streets and continues to threaten them. Events escalate even further when the pursuer gets hold of Rachel’s phone and begins not only terrorizing her, but brutally attacking her personal contacts.

There’s not a whole lot of backstory here. Protagonists Rachel and Andy aren’t given much opportunity to make an impression early on, only carrying a few brief exposition-related conversations in order to set up later events. This is also the type of film that regularly strains credibility, with car crash after car crash occurring and the villain being able to bounce several vehicles off the road without, for the most part, suffering any serious damage to his own transport. And of course, the police only seem to get involved in the proceedings when it’s convenient for them to do so, and they can be dispatched easily.

Still, while the movie doesn’t have logic going for it, it does have a charismatic antagonist to carry viewers. While he’s certainly taking the role seriously, Crowe also appears to be having a good time playing a maniac, snarling his way through proceedings. The performer delivers a couple of choice lines at Rachel’s expense, staring her down and informing her that if she thinks she’s already having a bad day, then he’s going show her just how awful things can truly get. He does express frustration at being ignored and mistreated by others, but it’s not overly somber.

Truthfully, it’s the proper approach to the role, as some of his character’s actions are truly disturbing and grotesque, which would put a damper on the requisite need for thrills and excitement as cars barrel down the road.

Another plus is the stunt driving, which is impressive. Vehicles hurtle down narrow streets, spin out into traffic, plow into medians and occasionally drive right through people. These sequences are as exaggerated as they come, but it looks remarkably dangerous. The chases are expertly edited, providing a clear sense of geography and tension to the pursuit.

And since there isn’t a deep backstory here, the film is happy to deliver some enraged outbursts and crashes before wrapping things up quickly and efficiently.

The movie doesn’t have much more to say to viewers than to cut strangers out there a bit of slack when they make mistakes or else you may find yourself in a very unpleasant situation. It is silly and is far from fine art, but the stunts are great to watch, Crowe’s demented turn is amusing and even the protagonists become more relatable and likable as they are stalked by the antagonist. *Unhinged* isn’t going to go down as a classic, but it will provide some thrills to those looking for a zippy little genre flick.

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