

'Wrath of Man' offers an action fix, with an occasional twist

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 14 May 2021 04:27



Rating: <<<

out of <<<<<<

Running Time: 119 minutes

This feature from United Artists will be playing at theaters and drive-ins on May 7.

The heist movie has been around almost as long as cinema itself. In fact, so many have been produced in recent years that it seems as if there is little about them that is unfamiliar. The latest release featuring crooks trying to steal a fortune and the people out to stop them is *Wrath of Man*, which

is actually a remake of the 2004 French film,

Le Convoyeur

aka

Cash Truck

. As one might expect, certain elements on display here feel obvious and ordinary.

Still, the shootouts and chases are exciting and the screenplay does at least make an attempt to add a wrinkle here and there to the genre formula.

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A series of deadly heists involving cash trucks puts the employees of a Los Angeles security firm under great duress and concern for their future. Good thing for them that Harry "H" Hill (Jason Statham) has been hired. Despite being a guarded and less-than-sociable presence, the new figure quickly makes a big impression with coworkers Bullet (Holt McCallany), Boy Sweat Dave (Josh Hartnett) and Dana (Niamh Algar). After foiling a robbery attempt and making short work of the crooks involved, the group begins to wonder about H's past.

Through the use of flashbacks, his checkered history starts to come to light and suspicions are raised not only about the protagonist himself, but whether or not the crimes could be an inside job.

The film is directed and co-written by Guy Ritchie (*The Gentlemen*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Snatch*, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*), an appropriate choice to tell a story about shady figures. However, this feature is significantly more hard-boiled than his previous efforts. There is a lot of chatter early on as the various characters are introduced, but the cadence does come across as odd-sounding in a downtown L.A. environment, and isn't as effectively cutting or witty. There is an amusing zinger here and there, but the humor that permeates Ritchie's other work feels sidelined here. The movie could certainly use more gallows humor from its supporting cast to alleviate the mood.

At least some of cast members are distinctive, including the gruff but genial Bullet, who admires H's abilities while also confessing to having unsettling vibes hovering over his coworker. The tough-talking, but fearful Boy Sweat Dave also helps provide some personal drama to the story as violence erupts. Alas, many of the supporting characters fade into the background or serve as target practice once the lead's true motivations become clear and the final heist takes prominence. However, the movie does offer one unique twist, in that H's focus actually has little to do with the money that the villains and employees are so obsessed with either stealing or protecting.

On a technical level, the photography is sharp and the action is exceptionally well-staged. The opening sequence which is captured using an impressive single master shot doles out essential information while hiding important details that are revealed later in the story. There are some striking camera angles that also add some spice to the proceedings. Additionally, the movie uses temporal jumps to tell its story, which keeps one's attention through an otherwise straight-forward narrative. And lead Statham does well to engage viewers in his mysterious mission, even if he's less than a chatterbox and the reasons behind his actions will ultimately

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feel familiar.

In the end, this movie is something of a mixed bag. Some of the early dialogue exchanges come across as stiff and some intriguing figures appear only to be forgotten. But the effective storytelling still maintains interest and the big set pieces are dynamic. So, while it is imperfect, *Wrath of Man* should offer a few charms and work well enough for anyone simply looking for an action fix.

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