

'Gunpowder Milkshake' looks great, but doesn't resonate

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<<

out of <<<<<<

Running Time: 114 minutes

This Netflix feature will make its streaming debut on July 16.

The writing/directing team of Navot Papushado and Aharon Kashales garnered a lot of press in 2013 for their gritty and disturbing Israeli genre picture "Big Bad Wolves." It earned a sizable cult following. While the team still collaborates, each has gone off to create individual works along the way. "Gunpowder Milkshake" is Papushado's English-language film debut, an over-the-top, bloody action picture with plenty of style to burn.

The movie certainly looks great, but the story and plight of the characters isn't as well developed as the visuals, and the end result doesn't make an emotional connection.

Sam (Karen Gillan) is an assassin for a mysterious organization known as The Firm, taking assignments from an agent named Nathan (Paul Giamatti). The opening scene reveals that her

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mother (Lena Headey), who also worked in the same profession, left her as a teen and never returned home. Over the years, Sam has transformed herself into a cold and efficient killer, but still harbors deep resentment about her mom's disappearance. A new assignment requires her to eliminate a target and retrieve stolen money.

However, things don't go as planned. The protagonist saves a young girl Emily (Chloe Coleman) after carrying out the job and feels compelled to take care of her. This act causes friction between the hired gun and her employers. Sam and Emily go on the run and are pursued by various thugs, as well as the leader of a gang seeking revenge for one of the killer's earlier hits.

As mentioned, the movie looks slick. It is shot in bright neon hues, taking place in an almost surreal world. The fights are graphic and bloody (with many crooks going down in a hail of bullets or under the blade of the main character), but it is clear that the filmmaker is aiming for laughs instead of shocks. Some of it is very striking and well-choreographed.

There is a lengthy battle in which Sam's arms are nullified by a numbing agent and she is forced to adapt to the situation. A car chase sequence in a parking lot involves plenty of impressive maneuvers in tight spaces. And a climactic shoot-out features a camera tracking slowly through a diner as various figures trade gunfire.

Even the costumes and sets are over-the-top, with the lead decked out in an amusingly garish orange bowling jacket and moving through stylized locations. But while it is visually arresting, in truth it is unlikely that anyone watching will be fully engaged in the proceedings. Story elements feel pieced together from other, stronger movies (most notably "Leon: The Professional"). Other than being left behind as a youth, Sam isn't chatty and we don't get much of an opportunity to relate to her or get a real sense of her trauma.

Most of the attempts at humor and bickering between the protagonist and other characters land with a thud.

Another concern involves the villains themselves. A clever, diabolical villain can provide plenty of tension in a story, as well as some great back and forth with the protagonist as they discuss their motivations. Sadly, in this picture it's a group of dim and buffoonish thugs who exist simply

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to be mowed down. They don't feel like threats, just target practice.

The primary villain doesn't even interact with the protagonist until the climax. The incredible supporting cast isn't utilized particularly well either. A group of killers played by Angela Bassett, Michelle Yeoh and Carla Gugino are introduced late in the story. They certainly kick butt, but even their wisecracks aren't as biting or funny as they should be.

All of the elements are here for an over-the-top slice of action movie fun, but the movie doesn't land enough jokes and never feels as dangerous or exciting as it should. "Gunpowder Milkshake" is reasonable enough to entertain in the moment, but lacks the substance or relatability required to make a deeper and more lasting impression.

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