

‘Bullet Train’ is an eccentric action-packed ride

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

out of <<<<<<

Running Time: 126 minutes

This feature from Sony Pictures is playing exclusively at theaters and IMAX screens on Friday, Aug. 5.

With the summer winding down, many studio offerings in August are lower profile movies or more eccentric fare. The action picture “Bullet Train” certainly falls under the latter category. It’s a violent, over-the-top action picture that depends on viewers overlooking the numerous coincidences it would take for all the events depicted to actually occur.

Perhaps it’s the cast, the stylish neon-tinged photography or the action scenes, but as this exaggerated feature rapidly hurtled forward, this reviewer found himself being won over by the flick. The movie is a blast that delivers thrills and dark comedy in equal measure.

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The tale is told from the point of view of an assassin (Brad Pitt) convinced that he is cursed by bad luck. After seeking therapy for his psychosis, he returns to work under the assigned name of Ladybug. His mission is to board a bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto and steal a suitcase.

It seems like a simple job, until other killers appear onboard. They include Yuichi Kimura (Andrew Koji), a man seeking revenge against the clever sociopath Prince (Joey King) who pushed his child off a building ledge. Other passengers include Tangerine (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) and Lemon (Brian Tyree Henry), two British gunmen assigned to escort a young man (Logan Lerman) to his dad, a notable and mysterious Russian mobster known as White Death. Additionally, there is a knife-wielding Mexican assassin named Wolf (Benito Antonio Martinez Ocasio) and an executioner named Hornet (Zazie Beetz), whose specialty is using snake poison.

Connections between all the characters are slowly revealed, leading to bloody confrontations.

While details for the numerous and varied assortment of characters could have easily bogged things down early on, this feature wisely gets its protagonist onto the train as quickly as possible and then begins to identify others, eventually doling out backstories for everyone. The approach of throwing one into the middle of a dangerous situation does allow for plenty of action and suspense early on as Ladybug (and the audience) attempts to get his bearings and other murderers see familiar faces and also try to piece together what is occurring.

The Kimura storyline is more somber and serious than other threads and because of the rapid pacing, it does take a bit of time for the jokes to land early on. However, as more details come to light about these killers, it results in more laughs. The movie is brutal and cruel towards the assassins (which makes sense, given that most of them are cold-blooded murderers), but the humor serves as an entertaining contrast.

Ladybug's attempts to remain calm during attacks and provide philosophical enlightenment are entertaining. In fact, all of the characters have very peculiar quirks that make an impression. In particular, the brotherly bickering between Tangerine and Lemon is fun to watch.

There is also a hilarious flashback towards the close involving an unexpected subject that amusingly pokes fun at the previous reveals while employing entertaining camera angles.

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Other visuals in the film are just as striking, with the train itself ultimately becoming a character. There are interesting individual compartments, including one with a large costumed figure that also creates some unexpected tension.

The set design and bright lighting lend a slick appearance that is always impressive. And director David Leitch (“Deadpool 2”) certainly knows how to shoot and edit action. While some scenarios are truly outrageous (including one with characters hanging from the edge of the moving train), it’s all exciting and dynamically shot.

As mentioned, when all is revealed the various acts of the characters aren’t likely to hold up to scrutiny. But it’s clear that everyone involved knows this and are simply having fun with the absurdity. The cast is uniformly excellent and there’s a unique and crazed energy to the entire enterprise that should bring a smile to action film fans. “Bullet Train” is a wild and wooly action picture from beginning to end that is worth catching on the big screen if you can nab a ticket.

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