

‘Polite Society’ kicks some serious butt

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 05 May 2023 03:11



Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 103 minutes

This film from Focus Features opens at cinemas on Friday, April 28.

As a reviewer, I try to make a point not to see trailers for films. It's not because I don't admire the work that goes into creating effective adverts. Instead, going into a picture cold can help to prevent having any preconceived notions or feelings toward what is about to be screened.

It can't always be done, but the technique sometimes results in viewing a feature with little prior knowledge and being really taken by it. The comedy/martial arts film *Polite Society* is one such example. It combines a variety of elements so effectively and is so much fun that one can't help but be entertained.

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Ria Khan (Priya Kansara) is an eccentric British-Pakistani teenager who spends most of her time doing martial arts training in her backyard, hoping to become a stuntwoman. Despite her moody older sister Lena (Ritu Arya) suddenly dropping out of art school, the youngster still encourages her sibling to continue with their aspirations, much to the chagrin of their parents (Shobu Kapoor and Jeff Mirza).

However, when the family are invited to an upper-class party by Raheela (Nimra Bucha), Lena connects with the host's son, handsome geneticist Salim (Akshay Khanna). The older sister decides to give up becoming an artist, marry her new beau and move to Singapore. This news does not please Ria, who doesn't like the radical change seen in Lena.

With help from classmates Clara (Seraphina Beh) and Alba (Ella Bruccoleri) she sets out to uncover dirt on Salim and use any method she can to prevent her sibling from getting married.

It does take a few minutes to get on this film's unusually exaggerated wavelength. The characters are more than willing to get into over-the-top physical altercations at the drop of a hat. This is a world where fights break out in school, at home, during wedding nuptials, and, well, just about anywhere. These conflicts take place between other students, family members and even day spa workers. In fact, a great deal of humor is derived from both the unusual locations and the participants in these battles.

If that weren't amusing enough, the big kicks and swings leave plenty of broken glass and plaster, often without much concern from those around. Once you get used to it, the eccentric little quirks help distinguish the film from other martial arts sequences and give them a fun, surreal element.

Of course, the biggest plus is the charming cast. Kansara is remarkable as the young lead. Shots of her glowering out the window at Salim and her potential mother-in-law are hilarious. Additionally, there is plenty of witty back-and-forth dialogue with Arya, who becomes increasingly frustrated by her sibling's extreme behavior.

The not-so-well-planned schemes from the young lead and her pals that go sideways are amusing, leading to outrageous moments and Ria being reprimanded by all around her. But even when events become increasingly over-the-top (and they most certainly do by the final

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act), the central relationship between the sisters is relatable, which keeps the film grounded and viewers emotionally invested. Khanna also makes an impression as the suitor Salim, a seemingly nice guy with a bizarrely close relationship to his mother.

Truth be told, everyone involved lands a high percentage of jokes from the quick-witted screenplay. The film is also beautifully shot and moves at a quick pace. It never takes itself overly seriously or bluntly delivers its message, but does subtly address familial bonds and female empowerment, in addition to poking fun at the upper class and arranged marriages.

Still, the main goal of the picture is to entertain and it does so exceptionally well. The movie is a hoot to watch from beginning to end and offers enough unique spins on familiar elements to make it feel fresh. It's the kind of surprise that really perks a movie reviewer up and has them looking forward to going back out to the movies again. As far as this critic is concerned, *Polite Society* delivers laughs and kicks some serious butt.

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