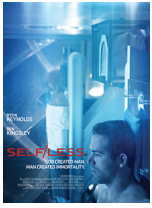


SELF/LESS Doesn't Stick in the Memory Bank

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 10 July 2015 05:08



Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 116 min.

It's always nice to see an original title being released amidst a sea of sequels and remakes (even if the basic concept bears some similarity to 1992's *Freejack*. That is why it pains me all the more to say that

Self/less

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doesn't do anything to distinguish itself from every other action/thriller currently out there. It features a solid cast and a couple of decent action scenes, but no vitality or fresh ideas.

Billionaire industrialist Damien (Ben Kingsley) is a man who has everything except time. With only months before a terminal illness ends his life, he pays a secretive scientist named Albright (Matthew Goode) to attempt a "shedding" procedure. The operation transplants his mind into that of an empty vessel (Ryan Reynolds). It is a success, leading to montages of the character embracing his new-found youth. However, the new Damien suddenly experiences brief flashes of another life. Albright insists that the body is simply tissue grown in a lab. Yet as the hero investigates (and develops unexplained fighting skills), he learns otherwise.

Director Tarsem Singh (*The Cell*, *The Fall*, *Mirror Mirror*) is known for his visually arresting style. In the past, even if the subject matter of his films didn't speak to me personally, at least they were beautiful to look at. By comparison, the visuals in this effort are shockingly muted. There are some production design flourishes in Damian's apartment and the scientific lab has a coolly imposing appearance. Unfortunately, the rest of the film never looks like much more than a made-for-TV movie. Beyond a couple of smooth dolly and crane shots, there's a distinct lack of photographic showmanship.

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Since little attention is placed on the visualizations of Damien's sudden flashes depicting another life, or the strange duality of looking into a mirror and seeing a different person, the performers alone are forced into maintaining viewer attention. Reynolds, Kingsley and the rest of the cast are all engaging enough to keep us watching in the moment, but there isn't enough meat to the by-the-numbers story to generate much suspense.

The lead seems to care only about avoiding capture, retrieving some important medicine and stopping his nemesis - there's little examination of the potentially trippy concept. One would think that the character would be torn about how to handle the ramifications of stealing another man's body, but there's no inner conflict depicted. He goes through the action hero motions and it's only after the climax that any attention is paid to face the curious situation at hand.

Sure, the movie is diverting enough to keep the attention of viewers, but it certainly feels like a missed opportunity. *Self/less* could have been a thriller featuring a protagonist with crossed wires in his head, shifting between personalities. Heck, can you imagine the drama from a story in which the lead was both the hero and villain fighting over the body they both possessed? Well, you won't find it here. Instead, the plotting follows a well-worn and generic path. As a result, this movie isn't likely to stick in the memory bank long after the credits roll.