Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 15 January 2016 10:52



Rating: «« ***out of 4 stars***

Running Time: 101 min.

January never lets me down. This week, the studios have brought us a haphazardly slapped together sequel. *Ride Along 2* arrives quickly on the heels of its 2014 predecessor and features its two leads getting into all new cop-based shenanigans in Miami. Despite the best efforts of its capable cast, the approach taken is safe, bland and ultimately predictable.

Since the events of the first film, Ben Barber (Kevin Hart) has become a rookie cop, much to the chagrin of his detective/future brother-in-law James Payton (Ice Cube). When he comes into contact with a mysterious flash drive, Payton is sent to Miami to investigate. Eager to prove himself, Barber begs to come along. Once in Florida, the pair encounter a computer genius on the run (Ken Jeong), a villainous businessman/drug dealer (Benjamin Bratt) and a local detective (Olivia Munn) with an abrasive personality similar to that of Payton.

The two lead actors have comic timing and possess onscreen charm, but they’re not able to use it in this story. This by-the-numbers plot almost feels like a less-edgy sit-com episode. There’s little to get worked up about and even less in the way of tension - viewers never feel any concern for the safety of the characters. You know a screenplay has problems when the biggest threat at the end of the second act involves a character potentially being fired from their job. It’s hardly the proper kind of dramatic stakes a movie needs.

There are perhaps a half-dozen laughs in the story. Hart has an amusing reaction to a video game and is funny when he feels antagonized and attempts to express his “vision” for his upcoming nuptials. Cube has a couple of amusing deadpan comments. However, many comic

set pieces in the story feel inorganic and forced. This includes an encounter with an alligator at a fancy party. Like many other gags, it is completely removed from the plot itself and plays like a strange tangent, then the event is quickly forgotten.

And while the leads try their hardest to invent some laughs out of nothing, the supporting cast are given the thankless job of delivering little more than flat exposition. The antagonists aren’t allowed to assert themselves over the course of the story and as a result aren’t memorable. It’s a disappointment because placing Barber in a truly dangerous situation with his brother-in-law would allow for a lot of drama, more outrageous scenarios and ultimately some bigger laughs. However, the cast aren’t allowed to do any more than go through the motions.

Fans of the performers and those who loved the first movie may find it passably entertaining. Yet even within its PG-13 confines, most will still note the serious lack of edge and vitality in this sleepy sequel. *Ride Along 2* never picks up any momentum and instead takes it talented performers on a slow and uninspiring trip around the block.

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