

Triple 9 – A simple, pulpy tough guy flick

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 26 February 2016 02:48



Rating: ««« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 115 min.

Director John Hillcoat has a resume that includes plenty of rough and tumble films like *The Proposition*

,
The Road

, and most recently,

Lawless

. His latest effort is no exception.

Triple 9

is full of scowling, mean characters that would shoot you just as soon as look at you. This heist story is a bit sillier and less thoughtful than his other efforts, but if you're in the mood for a simple, tough guy action flick, you could do worse.

Set in Atlanta, the plot follows ex-militia man Michael (Chiwetel Ejiofor) and his team (which includes plenty of crooked cops) as they attempt to pull off a heist for a Russian mobster's wife, Irina (Kate Winslet). Michael's motivation is the hope of having his son returned to him. However, he is quickly informed that more is required of him. It's an impossible task, but when team member Marcus (Anthony Mackie) is partnered with an idealistic beat cop Chris (Casey Affleck), the group realize that the murder of a fellow officer might create a long enough distraction to complete the complicated job.

There's nothing unfamiliar or unique about the story or the general theme – crime doesn't pay. With the exception of Chris, the lead characters will certainly turn off many viewers. Despite being cops, they're mean, duplicitous and will stop at nothing to get what they want - even when

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it involves killing their own. This is a violent film with a couple of strong, wince-inducing moments and most of these people eventually come to an unpleasant end.

At least the impressive cast (which also includes Clifton Collins Jr., Aaron Paul, Norman Reedus and Woody Harrelson) is having a lot of fun with the material, milking every hard-boiled line and situation with gusto. One highlight includes a scene in which an investigator arrests a woman on narcotics charges, and then openly ingests the illegal drug and grills the detainee while high.

Personally, I enjoyed seeing Winslet cast against type as a cold and cruel mob boss who carries bodies around in her car trunk and torments everyone she interacts with. Between her surprising actions, the numerous confrontations between crooked cops, some, well and colorful turns of phrase and plenty of long, hard stare-downs, it becomes quite a bit of pulpy fun.

The photography captures the city at its ugliest. There's a lot of dark, dim lighting and soft haze that seems to further emphasize the distrust and moral ambiguity between the groups of people. Additionally, the film boasts some impressively staged action scenes that also help to heighten the tension. The crosscutting during the climax is particularly effective, combining an attempted assassination, a car hurtling down a roadway to a location along with the big, final heist. This final act is genuinely exciting.

Of course, there are a few strange elements. Ejiofor is compelling as Michael, but his motivations are odd. While he is a clever robber, it is curious that the character would go through with this incredibly dangerous scenario - it's obvious that he's unlikely to get what he wants and this viewer couldn't help but wonder if he might have been better off taking a different tact against the mob. And as previously mentioned, there isn't much subtext to the proceedings. In essence, it's a more conventional action movie from the director and lacks bigger thematic aspirations.

In the end, *Triple 9* isn't nearly as strong as some of the director's previous efforts. However, it's an entertainingly mean and gritty little thriller that benefits from a very game cast. I've seen hundreds of heist movies just like this, but at least this effort is lively and enjoyable to watch as it takes its characters down a particularly dark and ugly path. It's flawed and something of a guilty pleasure, but it gets the job done.

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