

'Hardcore Henry' is all chaos, no character

Written by By Glenn Kay
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Rating: «« out of 4 Stars

Running Time: 96 min.

A strange thing happened during the preview screening of the first-person action flick, *Hardcore Harry*

While some members of the audience hooted and hollered at the over-the-top events and violence appearing onscreen, many others were less than impressed. I counted at least 20 walkouts in the opening half-hour. It felt like there was constant movement of people in and out of the theater. That's a huge number of people throwing up their hands in dismay. Clearly, this is going to be a polarizing cinematic experience.

For me, the reaction wasn't as severe, but I certainly wasn't cheering either. Yes, I thought that there were many admirable elements. The first-person perspective is a daring way to tell a story. We don't see what Henry looks like until very late in the film and the reveal isn't very clear. The character can't even speak and only communicates through hand gestures and head movements. And as expected, some of the stunts are remarkable. Yet on a personal level, I could not get on its wavelength and the barrage of non-stop action wore its welcome out very quickly.

Henry is a cyborg who awakens in a lab. He's quickly told by a scientist named Estelle (Haley Bennett) that she is his wife. Almost immediately, the pair comes under attack by a bizarre, scenery-chewing villain named Akan (Danila Kozlovsky). Akan appears to possess psychokinetic abilities, raising other technicians off of the ground and executing them. Henry attempts an elaborate escape, but Estelle is taken hostage. Almost as soon as she disappears, Henry encounters Jimmy (Sharlto Copely), who explains that Henry is a super-soldier. Jimmy attempts to help the hero evade capture and seemingly meets his end on numerous occasions,

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only to reappear moments later in a different guise.

And that's essentially it, folks. That is all that is going on. For 90 plus minutes, Henry fights his way through all kinds of soldiers, leaving hundreds dead in his wake (perhaps it's thousands, I couldn't keep track). As mentioned, the stunt work and fight choreography is impressive. There are some wild visuals as the lead rappels down the side of a building, runs over the framework of a bridge, hangs from a helicopter and moves from floor to floor around buildings Parkour-style. The climactic fight is so stunt-laden, graphic and ridiculous that it was amusing to watch.

If only there were a compelling story to hang any of this action on. Viewers have no way of relating to the hero and as a result there is no reason to become involved in his plight. There's no character development for any of the characters. It's sad to see a veteran like Tim Roth wasted in a bit part of about five lines and perhaps a minute of screen time.

The villain's performance is as hackneyed as it gets, and when all is revealed, it makes little to no sense. Additionally, the constant and repetitive nature of headshots and exploding body parts isn't thrilling. In fact, it becomes dull and numbing. As for the first-person novelty/gimmick, the manic chases result in numerous camera moves and whip-pans that are difficult to follow.

It really is like watching someone play a video game for two hours. Despite all the chaos onscreen, there aren't any characters to care about and it soon had me checking my watch. I admire what the filmmakers were attempting with *Hardcore Henry*, but this experiment isn't developed enough to merit a feature-length film.

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