

‘Criminal’ wastes a talented cast, crew

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

Running Time: 113 min.

If you do happen to find yourself in the theater watching the action/thriller *Criminal* this weekend, I can think of a game you can play to pass the time. It's called "The Dutchman" and it involves taking a drink each time you hear that name uttered. A word of warning - by the final act, it seems like it's being yelled every single minute. I expect most will be thoroughly smashed by the credit roll. The fact there are now cinemas where drinking is a legitimate option leaves me both amused and frightened.

To put it bluntly, this movie is absurd. Its plot involves a CIA agent named Pope (Ryan Reynolds). He's working an important case involving a computer hacker known as... you guessed it... "The Dutchman" (Michael Pitt). Within the technician's flash-drive is a command that can control America's entire arsenal. Hidden away at a secret location, the programmer waits to make a deal with the CIA and gain asylum in the US. On his trail is a Spanish anarchist (Jordi Mollà), who would prefer to use the technology to destroy the world. When a set-up takes Pope out of the picture, it leaves the CIA in the dark.

So how do they find "The Dutchman"? Head honcho Quaker Wells (Gary Oldman) has a logical solution - he decides to call in scientist Dr. Franks (Tommy Lee Jones). Franks has been working for 18 years on a process that will transplant a dead man's memories into a living person. Unfortunately, the process exclusively works on men who have undeveloped pre-frontal cortexes. That leaves psychotic killer Jericho Stewart (Kevin Costner) as their only test subject.

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It isn't long after the experiment that Jericho breaks free from authorities. He has visions of Pope's life, subconsciously follows the CIA agent's routine and beats up anarchists (as well as random strangers) along the way. Alas, there's nothing the cast can do with this material - they're all wasted here, saddled with hackneyed dialogue. Their characters are thinly written and as more is revealed it all becomes sillier and sillier. The lead role of Jericho doesn't give Costner much to do besides swing his fists and grunt repeatedly.

With a story that's as over-the-top as this one, a knowing sense of humor could have helped. However, the tone here is consistently somber throughout. The visuals are drab and dull and the violence frequently ugly. Jericho beats people so severely that there isn't any real fun to be had from it.

Even more baffling is the lead's character arc. His interactions with Pope's wife (Gal Gadot) are the least convincing, particularly when confessing to the widow and her daughter that he is now beginning to, "...feel things." Yes, it's a redemption story in which a sociopath is coaxed by a family into becoming a caring human being. Or at least that's what the filmmakers want you to believe, because he still brutally kills a whole lot of people even after embracing his sensitive side.

While there are a few shootouts and a car chase towards the end of the picture, there also isn't nearly as much action as you would expect. The majority of the movie involves characters either walking briskly down hallways, staring at computer monitors or demanding to know where "The Dutchman" is. Overall, it's quite dull and doesn't even deliver on a cornball, B-movie level.

Criminal is an unfortunate blunder of a flick that doesn't make use of an impressive cast and crew. The story doesn't hook you and it becomes increasingly impossible to take seriously as it progresses. I could go on, but I think I'll stop here, say "The Dutchman" to myself and just get another drink.

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