

'The Nice Guys' offers amusing tough-guy shenanigans

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

Running Time: 116 min.

Writer/director Shane Black is probably the reigning champ of buddy pictures. He wrote *Lethal Weapon* (1987) and the underrated (if you ask me), *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996). Black has also been responsible for numerous and sometimes uncredited script rewrites on titles like *Predator* (1987).

Black's witty, tough-guy banter is as good as it gets and he's parlayed it into further success by scripting and directing more recent flicks. The hysterical *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005) and *Iron Man 3* (2013) are good examples. His latest, *The Nice Guys*, features two more misfits bickering their way through a murder mystery.

Holland March (Ryan Gosling) is a hard-drinking widower working as a private investigator and raising his daughter Holly (Angourie Rice). Jackson Healy (Russell Crowe) is a small-time enforcer who takes money to beat people up.

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When Rice is employed to threaten and dissuade March from following up on a case involving a missing niece, he does so coolly and efficiently. But when other underworld figures put the shakedown on Healy, he approaches the weary PI to help figure out what is going on. The case forces the odd pair to traverse through some seedy elements — specifically, the adult film and automotive industries.

This project isn't as strong as *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, but it does have some assets. In fact, the complicated conspiracy plot that unfolds isn't the reason to watch; sure, it's a reasonably enjoyable crime tale that takes a couple of unusual twists and turns, but this isn't a mind-blowing whodunit with a shocking reveal. Instead, it's the cast and dialogue that elevate the material. Gosling and Crowe are clearly having a great time with the script and their unscrupulous characters. They milk every barb and bizarre situation for all its worth.

The trailers may have dulled some of the impact of a few comedic moments, but there are several laughs you won't see coming. Despite being a PI, March isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer. Besides regularly endangering the life of his child, he's not a wordsmith and a few of his attempts at insight (one comment in particular involving Adolf Hitler) are amusingly obtuse.

Early on, there's a great scene involving a B&E gone horribly wrong. As the falls and mishaps add up, March even begins to assume he might be indestructible. Gosling isn't too goofy in the part and meets the silliness with a likable sad-sack quality. Healy is level-headed by comparison, garnering a lot of laughs from his blunt and brutish reactions to unfriendly individuals. His more roguish qualities are counterbalanced nicely by a friendship with March's daughter.

Together, the two eke laughs out of every long pause, unexpected comment and tangential conversation that occurs. The '70s production design and fashions are a hoot, too, leading to running jokes about Richard Nixon and giant killer bees that are amusingly paid off late in the film.

Admittedly, with writing like this that features extended bickering, the pacing is shaggy in spots and there are a few slow sections as the motivations of characters are slowly unveiled. Thankfully, the leads seem to be having such a great time that the feeling becomes infectious. Personally, while it doesn't hit the heights of the director's best efforts, there's still plenty of good tough-guy laughs in *The Nice Guys* to warrant a recommendation.

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