

'Central Intelligence' has some chuckles but lacks smarts

Written by gallupsun
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Rating: 2 out of 4 * *

Running Time: 114 min.

By Glenn Kay

For the the Sun

It seems as though the secret agent genre has been undergoing something of a resurgence recently, with titles like *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, *Spy*, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, *Mission : Impossible - Rogue Nation*

,

Spectre

and

Bridge of Spies

hitting cinemas over the past year.

Central Intelligence

is the latest effort to hit the big screen. It has its moments, but compared to the others listed,

opts to pick lower-hanging fruit from the branch.

Calvin (Kevin Hart) was once the shining star of his high school, destined for greatness. Now a mild-mannered accountant, he can't help but feel disappointed at how his life has turned out. Things change when a high school reunion is announced and he's reintroduced to Robbie Weirlicht (Dwayne Johnson), an oddball classmate who was mercilessly abused as a student (via a flashback and a disturbingly terrible CGI face morph effect). Despite undergoing a physical transformation, Robbie (who now goes by the name Bob Stone) is still as strange as he was back in school. In fact, he also claims to be a secret agent, dragging a reluctant and befuddled Calvin along on a rogue mission.

First the good news. Hart and Johnson make a good pairing and each play characters that offer something slightly different. While he's still allowed to deliver some big double takes and guffaws, Hart has a more understated role, essentially reacting to the weirdness that surrounds him. Johnson appears to be having fun playing up his action hero persona, spending as much time excitedly advocating for unicorns and 80s Molly Ringwald movies between beat downs on various bad guys. These conversations admittedly lead to a few laughs.

If only the script were up to snuff. Both of these performers make more out of the weak material they've been given; it's clear (through outtakes at the end of the film) that there was a lot of improvisation on-set. The idea of an average guy being put in danger by an acquaintance who may be completely insane and veering wildly between feeling empathy and terror from the situation has great potential. It's unfortunate that the movie rarely attempts more than obvious slapstick gags.

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Truthfully, the Rob Stone character appears to be insane and no revelations or surprises delivered can really account for this. As a result, it seems a bit strange not to play up his volatile nature, but every time the story seems to be headed in that direction, it pulls punches and turns sweet and syrupy. And some of the "good guy" agents introduced are quite nasty, leaving one to wonder why their conflicts are resolved genially and without any comeuppance.

There are a few impressive and surprising cameos that occasionally reinvigorate the movie. Whenever an unexpected performer appears on screen, the energy level suddenly increases. Still, the screenplay needs far more edge and more bite than it delivers. While watching the movie, I couldn't help but be reminded of 2010's *Knight and Day*. This is essentially the same concept, only with a lot more flatulence and genitalia jokes.

In truth, Hart and Johnson are charismatic together. Fans of the pair are likely to find enough moments of amusement to overlook the slapdash execution and numerous script flaws. I can actually see the movie doing quite well at the box office. However, one can't help but feel that had the filmmakers strived for more, they could have had something really special. *Central Intelligence* has a few chuckles, but it could've used more smarts.