

Cheap thrills delivered in Den of Thieves

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 19 January 2018 09:13



Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 140 min.

Lately, it seems the early part of the year has been turning into something of a home for crime pictures. In the last couple of years, we've seen titles like *Triple 9* and *Blackhat* released to modest fanfare.

Den of Thieves

certainly falls into this category. It's a heist picture that aspires to greatness, but doesn't quite hit the heights hoped. At least there are a few B-movie thrills here and there to make it a diverting if less-than-exceptional entry in the genre.

The focus of the story is Nick Flanagan (Gerard Butler), an LA sheriff obsessed with taking down the city's most elite gang of robbers. Led by Merrimen (Pablo Schreiber), the criminal and ex-Marine details an elaborate plot to steal \$30 million in untraceable bills from the Federal Reserve Bank with the assistance of pal Levi Enson (50 Cent) and a crew of ruffians. When Flanagan gets wind of an imminent heist, he and his team take their own extreme means. They forcibly attempt to manipulate the bartender/getaway driver team member Donnie (O'Shea Jackson Jr.) into helping them.

As expected, the cast does their hard-boiled best to try and keep things tense. These aren't the nicest people with Flanagan in particular coming off worse than most of the criminals. He flies off the handle readily at home and with coworkers. However, one assumes that this is the point and that we're all supposed to be having some fun watching the bad behavior on display. The action scenes are competently handled as well, with plenty of ways in which this overly

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elaborate robbery could go awry. When the heist is on, it's all reasonably diverting.

However, the feature isn't without problems. Frankly, it's way too long for its own good. The movie approaches two and a half hours and it could easily do with losing about thirty minutes. Sure, character development is important, but too much time is spent on Flanagan's impending divorce and his hostile relationship with his estranged wife (as well as the cops' attempts to keep in contact with his daughters). This thread really doesn't go anywhere or get clearly resolved, and as such it feels like unnecessary background noise.

There's also a great deal of posturing between the hero and Merrimen, which isn't particularly witty and gets repetitive. And sadly, 50 Cent isn't used sufficiently. He's a charismatic personality, but he isn't given nearly enough to do in the script. The character is always around, but doesn't do a whole lot. In fact, he is only given one big scene. It provides some comic relief, but is another tangent that doesn't ultimately go anywhere.

The movie is also strangely scored. While conversations involving plotting the job and the robbery itself have all the appropriate music stings, large chunks of the movie feature no music at all. There's a good half-hour early on that doesn't feature any dramatic music whatsoever, just the characters talking to one another. While the intent might be to present a gritty and real environment for the story, the silent pauses between lines are odd and make the dialogue come across in a flat manner. It's a strange choice overall.

Still, as mentioned, the heist itself is capably handled and there is an attempt to throw something of a left turn towards the close. The payoff feels like an homage to other, better crime films, but the attempt to lay in some kind of a surprise is still welcome. Truthfully, it's the most memorable thing about the flick. In the end, there's too much unnecessary material in *Den of Thieves*, and it's really not that good. However, it has a couple of amusing moments and tries its hardest to entertain. You probably won't remember anything about it in a week or two, but if you're stuck it may provide some B-movie yuks.

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