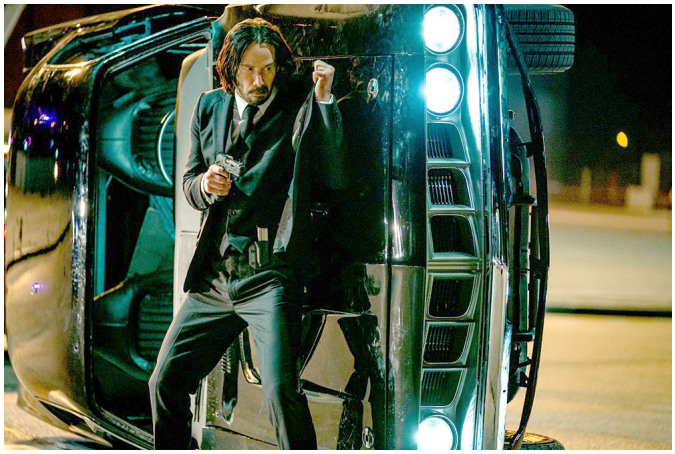
Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 169 minutes

This feature from Lionsgate will be opening exclusively at theaters on Friday, March 24.

In the past decade, this reviewer would be hard pressed to think of an action film character who has taken down more bad guys than John Wick (according to online enthusiasts, the body count tally after three movies is a whopping 299). The first movie in the series was a literal blast, and its sequels have done everything possible to outdo their predecessors.

John Wick: Chapter 4 is the latest follow-up and is intended to be the climax of the series. It’s a pretty safe bet to say that the filmmakers may have hit 500 after this adventure. The movie is so over-the-top that it can’t help but be a bit silly, but the charismatic leads and incredible fight choreography are thrilling to witness.

After being shot and plunging off of the edge of a Manhattan high rise, John Wick (Keanu Reeves) has managed to survive by hiding underground with the Bowery King (Lawrence Fishburne). Fully healed, he intends to hunt down the leader of The High Table, Marquis Vincent de Gramont (Bill Skarsgard). This man controls the council of the criminal underworld.

Naturally, the villain is also looking to cement his authority by wiping Wick out, sending out his goons to eliminate the rogue assassin. To further secure an advantage, Gramont makes individual deals with noted killer Caine (Donnie Yen) and rising star, Tracker (Shamier Anderson), who also begin their pursuit of Wick. Once again, the hero finds himself on the run, hopping around the globe and hoping to find a way to get close to Gramont.

As mentioned, the story is ridiculous and viewers do have to allow for plenty of lapses in logic. Dozens upon dozens of bad guys fight and shoot at Wick in public areas in front of onlookers (who don’t appear all that bothered by the fracas and simply continue going about their business). Police never appear in the major metropolises featured.

And, the evildoers even have a sinister radio network that broadcasts out of one of the observation decks of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. If that wasn’t odd enough, viewers may also question why Wick is so forgiving of Winston (Ian McShane), the friend who turned on him in the previous chapter.

Additionally, there are numerous conversations between the protagonist and acquaintances who ask Wick when the violence will stop and remind him that there is no way he can win this one-man war. They note that no matter how many he slays, another will rise and take the place of the deceased. The intent is fine, but the chastising does seem a bit much coming from other professional killers. It also doesn’t help that the filmmakers seem to take an almost gleeful delight in stabbing, shooting and maiming characters in the most wince-inducing ways imaginable.

In another movie, these issues might have been enough to turn this viewer against the feature. But star Reeves manages to keep viewers involved in Wick’s plight and never-ending quest for revenge. Chinese action hero Donnie Yen is also a great addition, adding his incredible skill and a notable threat to the proceedings.

And at least the film appears to be leaning into the silliness when it occurs, particularly during the entertainingly exaggerated final act. There’s a fun reference to a famous movie from the late 1970s during the radio broadcasts and several characters possess a dark sense of humor. There’s also a physical gag during the bloodletting involving the steps to Sacré-Cœur Basilica that provides a dark laugh.

Of course, the action itself is about as good as you’re likely to see in any film this year. There are lengthy battles with complex choreography, all set in front of visually striking locales. The Osaka hotel showdown is incredible to witness, as is the melee through Paris, including a memorable exchange on the road at the Arc de Triomphe.

Not only is it all impressively staged, but many pieces are creatively filmed. There’s a long overhead shot in a run-down building following Wick from room-to-room that is wonderful to behold and sure to put a smile on the face of any action enthusiast.

Additionally, the final climax delivers a satisfying close to the events.

For this reviewer, the original film will always be the strongest. That being noted, *John Wick: Chapter 4* is the best of the follow-ups. It delivers the most chaotic mayhem of any movie in the series, as well as several memorable supporting characters and closure for the central characters.

While the serious asides about revenge come across as loopy, at least the movie is trying to add some meaning to the madness.

In the end, if you enjoy seeing bones cracked and hundreds of thugs get riddled with bullets, then this movie is about as good as it gets.

Note: For those interested, there is a brief bonus scene after the final credits.

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