

Movie Review: 'Push' has a power a la 'Heroes'

by *Creators Syn. Movie Reviewers*

Might as well get this over with: The movie "Push" is a heck of a lot like the television show "Heroes." Or maybe "Anti-Heroes," or "Heroes in Hong Kong," or "If We Load This Movie With Style and Nifty Actors, Promise You Won't Compare Us to Heroes?"

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Sorry, no can do. Just like "Heroes," the characters in "Push" have specialized individual superpowers, they've split into good and evil factions and everybody's actions revolve around fulfilling or subverting a preordained future. There's even some portentous dialogue â€” "You help her and you help us all" â€” that sounds an awful lot like a certain "Heroes" line about saving a cheerleader.

"Push" is so "Heroes"-like that I kept expecting to hear the ominous, distant yodel of the "Heroes" soundtrack, which sounds like somebody in a cistern calling out for a lost puppy. (Once you've sat through "Heroes," your mind is forever tainted.)

On the plus side, "Push" looks great. Director Paul McGuigan works hard to infuse the film with atmosphere, aided by production designer Francois Seguin (who also collaborated with McGuigan for the noirish "Lucky Number Slevin"). At times, "Push" appears to have been shot through the aqua-blue light of an aquarium, and its attention to detail extends from the flourishes of wallpaper to many of the character's fingernails.

A nice set of those fingernails belong to Dakota Fanning, who plays a 13-year-old "Watcher," or clairvoyant, who can only see fate if she draws it in her sketchpad (with "Heroes," it was a painter). Fanning's character teams up with a "Mover" (telekinetic) played by Chris Evans, a stubble-faced good-guy hiding out in a Hong Kong tenement and ineptly using his skill to cheat at gambling.

Evans' and Fanning's big-brother/little-sister relationship parallels the Peter Petrelli/Claire Bennett combo in "Heroes," but Dakota Fanning — who has turned from a cute duck to a still-cute but slightly taller duck — carries most of the duo's charm. Evans spends much of the movie seeming out of it; he mocks Fanning for the Cyndi Lauper-like streaks of pink in her hair when he ought to be praising her for not having tattoos.

A swirl of other super-people comes into play, including "Pushers," who can put thoughts into the minds of others. One of them, played by well-tailored Djimon Hounsou, is the movie's villain, an agent from the Division who wants to form some kind of army. The other, played by the raven-haired Camilla Belle (who looks like a very pretty Vulcan), is Evans' love interest and the story's focal point: Why is everybody looking for her? What secret does she know about a mysterious object hidden in Hong Kong? Why is her blood turning black?

Writer David Bourla maps out enough twists and characters to fill a season of a TV show, and "Push" suffers from it: The plot plods where it ought to propel. Story threads get lost in the shuffle (what's with the silver beads agents are leaving around Hong Kong?) and cool characters — including an object manipulator played by Cliff Curtis, who lives large on fake money — wind up with little to do.

The best moments in "Push" exist outside the plot churn. There's an unforgettable zoom into the cat-eyed face of a screaming Asian "Bleeder," whose ability seems to cross "Scanners" with a Memorex commercial. Equally memorable is Evans' use of floating guns, which shake in midair as he becomes scared; and a detection-shielding "Shadow" who chews a toothpick and says things like, "No offense taken cupcake. I know you're sweet on the champ."

Best of all is the way "Push" contrasts Fanning's dark-paper, grease-penciled artistic premonition style with that of her nemesis, a lollipop-sucking, stiletto-heeled beauty who coldly draws on graph paper.

Though the movie falls apart by the time of its showdown ending (which includes jumpsuited henchmen who seem to have wandered off the set of a 1960s James Bond picture), "Push's" attention to detail gives it a fair amount of pull.

"Push." Rated: PG-13. Running time: 1 hour, 48 minutes. 2.5 stars.

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