Movie Review: Run Clive Run - Owen shines in gripping financial thriller

by Creators Syn. Movie Reviewers

"The International" is not quite world-class, but it is a timely, involving thriller set in the miasma of global banking, and it crackles with tension.

In this era of economic meltdown, the movie resonates. There's a squirm when a grubby monetary executive explains, "You control debt, you control everything. This is the essence of the banking industry. Whether countries or individuals, it is to make us all slaves to debt."

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Clive Owen is a nifty fit as a weary Interpol detective tracking the nasty dealings of a huge European bank that has its tentacles in money laundering, small arms sales to Middle Eastern countries and the financing of Third World coups.

Joining him in the investigation is Naomi Watts, a frazzled assistant New York City district attorney. Watts and Owen have negligible wattage. In "21 Grams" and "The Ring," she displayed attitude and grit. In "The International," Watts is distant and dull.

In an unbelievable moment, she gets hit straight-on by a speedy car only to be up and about in the next scene with a bruised shoulder and an arm bandage. Instead of dead, apparently she heals like Wonder Woman.

Owen, with grizzled face and stubbly beard, is rumpled all the way through. Says Watts, checking out his frazzled demeanor, "You look awful. When's the last time you got any sleep? When's the last time you had a good meal?" He may look terrible, but his acting isn't.

"The International" is directed by the internationally respected Tom Tykwer, the German visual virtuoso who 10 years ago made a reputation with the hot "Run Lola Run."

For "The International," the action is set in Berlin, Milan, New York City and, crucially, Istanbul. A chase scene through the corridors and rooftops of that teeming city's Grand Bazaar is gripping, a cinematic tour de force as Owen weaves among the stalls and the thousands of visitors.

As the film takes on a labyrinthian web of corporate greed, two superb villains emerge:

Armin Mueller-Stahl, the great 78-year-old German actor from "Avalon," portrays a mysterious bank associate arranging the assassinations of those opposing the corporation's nefarious business.

Irish actor Brian F. O'Byrne, a Tony Award winner ("Frozen") who is part of the gifted cast of Showtime's "Brotherhood," plays a hired gun called The Consultant who eerily blends into the background, a wicked trick considering he's a coldblooded sniper.

The film's great action chunk takes place at New York City's circular Guggenheim Museum amid the modernistic installations and sculpture. Tykwer took six weeks to film it. It shows. He created an explosive and exquisite vignette of destruction and body count.

The movie could've used a less-lecturing screenplay. First-timer Eric Warren Singer's dialogue is overstuffed with aphorisms: "Sometimes, man can meet his destiny on the road he took to avoid it," for instance, and "Sometimes, the hardest thing in life is to know which bridge to cross and which to burn."

Let's bite on that one. "The International" is a bridge worth crossing.

"The International." Rated: R. Running time: 1 hour, 58 minutes. 3 stars.

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