

Movie Review: 'The Lookout'

by David_Elliott

"The Lookout" opens with one of the most risky or foolhardy gambits in any movie. It empties almost all sympathy for the protagonist.

'THE LOOKOUT' - Jeff Daniels and Lewis Gordon Levitt are featured in the action film 'The Lookout.' CNS Photo courtesy of Allen Fraser. Chris Pratt, played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, is seen driving at fast speed through the Kansas night, when he turns off his lights. He wants his lovely girlfriend to savor the fireflies flashing overhead, and the resulting smash (a farm combine was left on the road) kills two people, though not Chris.

After that stunningly idiotic stunt, we are asked to care about Chris' recovery as the town "gimp" who has some memory lapses, trouble with sequential actions and other issues. Gordon-Levitt, so good as the boyish gumshoe in "Brick," has another burden here; his caring co-tenant is a blind man, acted by the superlative Jeff Daniels.

Lewis may be blind, but his mental radar is wide awake and he is full of smart remarks. He's the high point in a pretty flat landscape, though romantically disappointed ("I've been turned down more often than the beds at the Holiday Inn"). Whenever he's on hand, the story upticks to a level where the former hockey hero Chris seems fumbling and obtuse.

Scott Frank, the screenwriter ("Little Man Tate, "Minority Report") directing his first feature, relies on us to connect the dots when Chris can't or Lewis isn't around. The "hero" is quite a mess, and as night janitor at a bank he is lured (via a tootsie named Luvlee) into a gang of crooks, hoping for ego revenge on his controlling, wealthy father (Bruce McGill).

Lewis, though he intuits that things are going wrong, isn't around when Chris falls for the oozing patter of mouth weasel and ex-con Gary (Matthew Goode). Gary's retinue includes a gun creep who must be on loan from David Lynch's reserve supply.

The heist is a tiny-burg big score by losers. Good with vaguely "In Cold Blood" pacing and atmosphere, director Frank asks us to buy the quirky bank reappearance of a doughnut-bearing cop, then the absence of cops after the heist and bloody shootout, and even Gary walking around for hours with a hole in his gut that could put Paul Bunyan into his grave.

Despite the tricky overlay of Chris dealing with his issues, "The Lookout" tends to bubble along as a plot-boiler. Chris' guilty fantasy about the past girlfriend, just as he works up nerve for some major action, is the kind of twist that one studies screenwriting to learn and then surpass.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog) The better movie lost inside this one is about Lewis the blind man. He could make a great small-town detective, picking up clues at the Rotary hall, then heading out with his faithful dog, to uncover a body at the grain silo.

A Miramax Films release. Director, writer: Scott Frank. Cast: Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Jeff Daniels, Matthew Goode, Carla Gugino, Bruce McGill, Isla Fisher. Running time: 1 hour, 51 minutes. Rated R.
2 stars.

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