Movie Review: 'The Bourne Ultimatum'

by David_Elliott

Promo ads have been excitedly telling us that Jason Bourne "comes home" in "The Bourne Ultimatum." Which must bring him back to the bank, making another massive deposit for Universal Pictures.

'THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM' - Matt Damon and Julia Stiles are spies on the run in the espionage thriller 'The Bourne Ultimatum.' CNS Photo courtesy of Jasin Boland. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) And back in New York, where his secretly filed identity will finally be divulged. After many killings, a few more should do the job - he is haunted by their faces, but doesn't know their names. This could be a therapy movie for Killers Anonymous.

Bourne (Matt Damon) has been on the run for years, much like David Janssen's Richard Kimble in the old show "The Fugitive." But Kimble was highly human and vulnerable, while Bourne is more a Teflon torpedo: Damon plays him as if he had one tiny strand of DNA for emotion; the rest is all muscle and reflex.

At the start he's wounded, being chased in Moscow, but soon bursts into a medical facility with lots of drugs but no one on duty. Vladimir Putin is going to love that sequence.

Next, Bourne lams off to Paris, then Madrid, then Tangier, then "home." Though a solo fugitive pursued by ruthless black-op agents led by the world's most diabolical men, he can always find money, or a passport, or an access card. And a little quality time with nice Nicky (Julia Stiles) - she's about it for soul luggage.

The story stays in overdrive. Clipped dialogue ("Waterloo Station. South entrance. 30 minutes. Come alone.") alternates with madly adrenalized music. Every few minutes brings a frantic chase, explosion, fights, deaths, juiced by high-tech (computers, phones, spy cams) as Bourne's zigzag path confounds and frustrates the CIA master creep (David Strathairn).

He and an opposing spy-suit (Joan Allen), who is fairly human even though she looks like a steak knife in a designer sheath, circle each other with all the witty grace of piranhas. If our national security is in their hands, we had better look to Albania for help.

"Ultimatum" tries to stir sympathy for its indestructible hero. But Jason Bourne has all the charm of a howitzer. He needs some time with the Harry Potter bunch.

After being blasted to the ground by a bomb just feet away, dazed Jason picks himself up, hops down a steep hillside, hot-wires a motorcycle and saves Nicky from an Agency "asset" (killer), jumping roofs and scaling walls. The Moroccan police, who know the city, are simply helpless.

With almost every twist schemed, predicted or analyzed on computer screens, the movie seems to be

aggressively gestating its own video game. Why is this ramped-up hardware party so much less suspenseful than James Stewart simply staring through binoculars in "Rear Window"?

It's not only because Paul Greengrass is not Hitchcock. After all, Greengrass did a credibly tight job directing "United 93" and "Bloody Sunday." But those films fed off reality and had actual personalities. This is more like having a migraine in a pinball arcade.

Always hip to what is coming down, Jason snarls, "This isn't some story in the newspaper, this is real!" In the paper, he must read only the funnies.

A Universal Pictures release. Director: Paul Greengrass. Writers: Tony Gilroy, Scott Z. Burns, George Nolfi. Cast: Matt Damon, Joan Allen, David Strathairn, Julia Stiles, Albert Finney. Running time: 1 hour, 51 minutes. Rated PG-13. 2 stars.

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