

Fast and furious action fuels non-stop 'Wanted'

Contributed by Tim Riley
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WANTED (Rated R)

Some movies, like last summer's “Crank,” are an action junkie's adrenaline rush. The fast and furious pace of the murder, mayhem and destruction that fuels “Wanted” offers much the same jolts of kinetic energy that result in an orgy of non-stop thrills.

Based upon a series of comic books, “Wanted” is devoid of artistic or intellectual pretensions, merrily pursuing an absurdist fantasy of unrestrained violence. Most action pictures delineate the good guys from the bad, but in “Wanted” there's a sense of ambiguity that leaves certain things in doubt.

The central figure in “Wanted” is a far cry from the traditional comic book hero. Working as an office drone in a drab cubicle, Wesley (James McAvoy) is an unfortunate loser in a dead-end job as an account manager constantly besieged by a harridan boss.

His life is made even more miserable by the fact that his shrewish girlfriend Cathy (Kristen Hager) is sleeping with his best friend and co-worker Barry (Chris Pratt). Addicted to prescription pills for panic attacks, Wesley's pathetic excuse for an existence might just as well come to an end and save him from a lifetime of prolonged misery.

In fact, this nearly comes to pass when Wesley is at the pharmacy to pick up a new batch of pills, and suddenly finds himself in the middle of a gun battle between the appropriately-named Fox (Angelina Jolie) and a rogue agent named Cross (Thomas Kretschmann).

Fox informs the incredulous Wesley that the father he didn't know was a member of the ancient order of trained assassins pledged to carry out the unbreakable orders of fate, which are interestingly enough delivered in coded messages from weaving machines in a textile factory.

The drugstore shootout leads to an incredibly wild car chase in the streets of Chicago, eventually ending at a castle that serves as the headquarters for the mysterious group known as the Fraternity.

Wesley soon becomes acquainted with the fact that his heritage is to follow in his father's footsteps as an assassin.

The Fraternity's enigmatic leader Sloan (Morgan Freeman) intends to see that Wesley is fully trained to develop lightning-quick reflexes and superhuman agility. Once a nebbish, Wesley undergoes the type of rigorously bloody and violent training that would make military boot camp seem like a day at Disneyland.

The neophyte assassin is pummeled daily by brutes with menacing names like the Butcher, the Exterminator and the Repairman. After a day of being wounded by knives, steel bars and guns, Wesley is healed in a tub of mysterious healing lotions, in order to live for another day of sadistic beatings.

As our hero toughens up, he starts to relish his new life, even exacting revenge on tormentors from his past office job. The training program gets more intense as Wesley learns to ride atop of speeding trains, leaping from car to car as if he were impervious to death.

In one of his first assignments of meting out justice, Wesley is involved in a wild chase to take out a crime boss. One of the most spectacular vehicle stunts involves Wesley maneuvering a speeding vehicle to carry out the assassination on the target's most vulnerable spot. This crazy scene should not be divulged so as to not spoil its jaw-dropping surprise.

Seemingly ready for the big time, Wesley heads off to Europe to meet with the reclusive Pekwarsky (Terence Stamp), who offers a lead on the villainous Cross.

The European journey sets in motion a series of stunts and violent gun battles that are even more spectacular when occurring on a speeding train through a mountainous region. Slowly, it dawns on Wesley that the intentions of his deadly associates in the Fraternity aren't quite as noble as first presented.

Sorting out the betrayals allows for a climactic showdown at the Fraternity's castle that is also spectacular for its explosive action. “Wanted” delights in its aggressive pursuit of bloodlust and violence, offering a mindless enjoyment for fans of unbridled action and fantastic stunts.

DVD RELEASE UPDATE

According to CBS Television, the sci-fi drama series “Jericho” won't be on the network schedule for a third season. That hasn't stopped fans from using a Web site to press for renewed life of a defunct franchise.

Meanwhile, “Jericho: The Second Season” was recently released on DVD, including the series finale with an alternative ending that has never been broadcast.

Originally canceled after its premiere season, “Jericho” was brought back to television by a historic groundswell of fan support. Inspired by a line in the first season's finale, diehard fans sent over 20 tons of nuts to CBS executives in an effort to keep the series on the air.

“Jericho” chronicles what happens when a nuclear mushroom cloud suddenly appears on the horizon and plunges a small Kansas town into chaos, leaving its residents completely isolated and wondering if they're the only Americans left alive.

If you are wondering what all the fuss is about, then by all means pick up “Jericho: The Second Season” and send a bag of peanuts to CBS.

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