

'Gemini Man' pretty to watch, lacks character development

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 117 minutes

Director Ang Lee is responsible for several award-winning cinematic works, including *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Brokeback Mountain* and *Life of Pi*. At first glance, his latest feature appears to be an odd selection, as the filmmaker takes on what appears to be a fairly traditional and straightforward action picture. Thankfully, *Gemini Man* does try to throw an extra wrinkle into the formula and adds some new technical elements to the genre. Yet for all its effort, it doesn't end up making a lasting impression.

Henry Brogan (Will Smith) is an aging government hitman who decides that he's had enough of being an assassin after shooting a man whom an informant claims may have been an innocent party. Suspicious of his employers, Henry decides to retire. Soon, he begins to get an uneasy feeling, suspecting that the agency as well as his old trainer Clay (Clive Owen) may have other ideas about his future. It isn't long before Henry finds himself the target of a professional killer who seems to know his every move.

Enlisting the help of old friend Baron (Benedict Wong) and new acquaintance Danny Zakarweski (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), the hitman and his pals are chased around the globe as they attempt to find out who is gunning for Henry and why.

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Alas, if you’ve seen the trailer or even a brief commercial for this title, you’ll already know far too much about what’s in store for the central character. In fact, the first third of the film deals with the hero attempting to discover the identity of his pursuer...one who clearly bears more than a passing similarity to the lead. That’s a lot of time to devote to a plot twist that is already known to everyone who bought a ticket for the movie, and it certainly diminishes the level of suspense early on (although this isn’t the film’s fault and is simply an example of the marketing department giving too much away to the viewer).

What follows is a routine chase picture, but at least it’s impressive to look at as it unfolds. The characters end up on a globe--trotting quest to find the responsible party, moving from gorgeously filmed locations in Colombia and Hungary. Lee also shoots the action well, often using long takes that follow the characters through a variety of streets and environments without cuts. One chase follows Henry on a motorcycle through a city, twisting around corners and bumping into passing vehicles as he tries to escape with his life.

With the exception of a couple of big crashes at the climax of the sequences, the effects are good and these moments, while predictable, add some life to the proceedings.

However, there is a certain lack of urgency that begins to sink in as the already obvious motivations come to light and Henry must convince his attacker of the identity of their common enemy. Smith is a charming guy, but the effects on display end up overshadowing the performer. Copious digital work is used to place two persons who resemble each other in the same shot. While the tricks do look convincing at times, there are some issues with the technology that clearly haven’t been ironed out, especially when it comes to sound and dialogue.

Their banter falls flat, especially when they’re bonding and these scenes play as less-than-naturalistic. And the digitally altered younger hitman’s lines have certainly been dubbed in at a later date, which may be why their interactions don’t always gel.

While it’s nice that the screenplay tries to develop character moments, like the lead’s loneliness due to his profession, and a growing emotional bond as one of the men seems to take on a more parental role, it all never feels truly grounded or believable. This is one example of an action movie that might have been better off to embrace the silliness of having several characters with the same body and really take the wild concept to the craziest and most extreme lengths possible.

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Admittedly, Gemini Man is a very pretty movie to look at and one that offers a few well-shot and edited chase sequences. Still, as much of a technical marvel as it may be, the relationships or personal drama presented don't really make an impact. Given the talent involved, this particular title isn't nearly as gripping or thrilling as it should be.

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