

Taken, Too: "Edge of Darkness" and "When in Rome"

Written by Mike Schulz

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EDGE OF DARKNESS

For better and/or worse, Mel Gibson hasn't exactly vanished from the public eye since his last starring role on-screen, in 2002's *Signs*. Yet even if, like me, you've spent an inordinate amount of time bemoaning the Crazy Mel antics - both public and directorial - of recent years, you might find it hard to resist his turn in director Martin Campbell's

Edge of Darkness

: Gibson's back, and, happily, he's pissed. The movie is a frequently ludicrous and borderline incoherent revenge thriller, but its leading man, busting heads and blasting weaponry, is in excellent form, lending his bereaved-dad role considerable passion and emotional urgency. Between the mid-'80s and late-'90s, no one delivered anguished-and-wrathful acting better than Gibson. Ten-plus years later, there's

still

no one who does.

Would that the entire film were as strong as its star. Gibson plays Detective Thomas Craven, who watches as his 24-year-old daughter (Bojana Nokakovic) is gunned down outside his Boston dwelling. (We're immediately tipped off to *Edge of Darkness'* melodramatic bent, as the girl's last words are, "Daddy, I have to

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tell

you something ... !") Initially thinking his child the unintended recipient of bullets meant for him, Craven learns otherwise after uncovering her top-secret involvement with Northmoor, a nuclear-testing facility of unsurprisingly sinister intent. (How evil is the company's CEO? He's not only played by white-collar-scumbag supreme Danny Huston but is also seen, in a photograph, shaking hands with President George W. Bush.) What follows is an awkward fusion of

Silkwood

and

Taken

- an edgy corporate-whistle-blower drama fueled by firearms and ass-kickings - and little of it, especially the out-to-lunch final reel, makes sense. Then again, thanks to Gibson, Campbell, and the marvelous Ray Winstone, little of it needs to.

Edge of Darkness' director comes through with a number of spectacularly gripping images and set pieces, among them a beautifully choreographed fistfight between Gibson and his daughter's edgy boyfriend (Shawn Roberts), and a horrifying highway murder and subsequent car crash. Yet it's Campbell's sensitivity to scenes of hushed and even haunting quiet that lifts the film, if only slightly, above its genre norm. (And certainly above the laughable, soulless

Taken

.) He allows Gibson the time and opportunity to let Craven's grief register as vividly as his anger, and does perhaps his finest work in the star's cryptic conversations with Winstone, who - as a shadowy, rasping fix-it man of mysterious allegiances and motivations - casually tucks the movie into his pocket and strolls off with it. I had a reasonably good time at

Edge of Darkness

, but if the entire movie had been nothing more than a two-hour loop of the joyously paranoid sequence in which Gibson and Winstone size each other up over a backyard bonfire, you wouldn't have heard me complain.



WHEN IN ROME

The romantic comedy *When in Rome* features Kristen Bell as a Guggenheim Museum curator who drunkenly wades into an Italian street fountain, retrieves a handful of tossed coins, and

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eventually discovers that their original owners have, as a result, magically fallen in love with her. I'll leave it to you to decide which is more ridiculous: that we're expected to take this supernatural development seriously, or that chirpy Kristen Bell could ever land a job as a curator for the Guggenheim. Either way, director Mark Steven Johnson's outing is mostly substandard rom-com piffle, albeit with one distracting difference - we're used to (momentarily) broken hearts in movies of this ilk, but I'm not sure I've ever seen one that boasted this much broken
glass.

Bell tosses a vase at her sister's wedding reception, shattering a tower of champagne flutes. Partner-in-adorableness Josh Duhamel knocks wine glasses onto the floor of an ill-lit restaurant. Suitor/stalker Jon Heder falls backwards into a glass coffee table. And just when you think the slapstick couldn't get more punishing, Duhamel is thrown, rather forcefully, into a passing car's windshield. Was Johnson, who also directed *Ghost Rider* and *Daredevil*, so nostalgic for action-flick violence that he just couldn't help himself? Or were screenwriters David Diamond and David Weissman - the authors, or should I say perpetrators, of the noxious *Old Dogs* - somehow convinced that this tepid comedy would play much funnier if characters were forever reaching for the Bactine?

These are but two burning questions inspired by *When in Rome*, but I promise you'll be left with others. Like, why is Bell photographed in such harsh light, so this already-pale actress seems on the verge of disappearing? Why has her character given up on love when she barely seems past puberty? Why the jarring, in-joke reunion between Heder and *Napoleon Dynamite* co-star Efren Ramirez? Why does the film drag out its disrupted-wedding climax for such a hellishly long time? Why is Anjelica Huston
in
this thing? And, in perhaps the most vexing head-scratcher of this badly composed, badly timed offering, why is Heder cast as a low-voiced, egotistical magician who extols the brilliance of his
"ill
u-u-u-u
sions"? Didn't the filmmakers realize that *Arrested Development*'s Will Arnett, for much of the movie, was standing right
next
to him?