



Action comedies are a very unusual genre indeed. Most often, they are primarily action films with a few laughs scattered about just to prove that they don't take themselves that seriously. "The A-Team" is a prime example of that type of film. Other times, action films take on a lot of comedic overtones; often in the form of satire or black comedy; "Tropic Thunder" did it very well (despite the negative of Ben Stiller's awful acting), while other films such as "The Mexican" and "Nurse Betty" failed miserably.

"Red" approaches action-comedy in a completely different way, one that got me thinking waaayyy back to a similar type of movie, 1980's "Hopscotch" with Walter Matthau. I was reminded of this film due to the fact that both have "bad guys" trying to kill our good guy former-spy heroes, but all the while you know damn good and well that the bad guys don't have a chance, so you just sit back and watch the good guys play road runner to the baddies' Wile E. Coyote.

Another similarity to "Hopscotch" is that you have protagonists that are older; although I'm still not sure how comfortable I really was in the way the script was continually calling out Bruce Willis' character for being "so old", when he is only in his mid-50s. But perhaps that's just a bit of paranoia on my part. In truth, the movie is a testament to "experience over youth" on almost

every level, a fact that the film hammers home in the use of some extremely talented “older” actors, most of whom usually do much more serious fare.

Willis, John Malkovich, Morgan Freeman, and Helen Mirren are the main group of former CIA killers who have been classified as RED; Retired; Extremely Dangerous. And are they ever. The movie purposely opens a bit slowly, as Willis’ Frank Moses tries to adjust to a mind-numbingly boring existence as a retiree in Cleveland (Ouch). He is so bored that he continually rips up his retirement checks just so he can talk with a customer support representative of the government, played to perfect perkiness by Mary-Louise Parker; a equally bored single woman who wants nothing more than to go “somewhere” (anywhere) and have some sort of an adventure in her life.

Be careful for what you ask for; or you shall get it. On night, Frank wakes up at 4 AM for some reason (his intuition kicking in), and manages to take out six black ops types sent to kill him. He then intuits that Parker’s Sarah Ross character would be in danger for talking so much to him, so he rushes off to Kansas City to save her...by kidnapping her.

There are several cute hostage bits between Willis and Parker before she realizes that he’s the Good Guy, and they go about getting the rest of “the band back together” before trying to get to the bottom of why they are being targeted for assassination. Freeman probably gets the short end of the characters when it comes to how interesting they are; his Joe Matheson is an operations/computer specialist now languishing in a rest home (and leering at the rear ends of nurses), rescued from living out his last few months by Frank.

Much more amusing are Malkovich as weapons expert Marvin Boggs and Mirren as Victoria, the most unexpectedly unapologetic assassin you’ll ever see. Malkovich chews up the scenery for every second of his screen time as the not-quite-all-there paranoid lover of heavy ordinance, while Mirren plays completely against type as a British operative who now spends her time loving her gardening work while “taking the occasional contract killing offer” to satisfy her remaining bloodlust. Mirren and Malkovich play off each other exceptionally well, and I might have had my biggest laugh when Mirren stepped out of her elegant high heels to slip into some big-assed combat boots so that she could gleefully man a 50 caliber machine gun wreaking havoc with several “bullet proof” vehicles. The look on her face tells you that Mirren was enjoying herself as well.

Willis wisely doesn’t try to upstage his more colorful co-stars. Indeed, Frank Moses is less like

John McLane and more like Liam Neeson's Hannibal Smith from "The A-Team", content to be the calm leader of eccentrics...but still The Man when it comes to making the plans, and getting into the fist-fights.

Mary-Louise Parker, however, is the one who holds the entire film together. In a way, it's sort of a repeat of her character from "Weeds"; she starts out as the ingénue, totally befuddled by everything going on around her, but as the movie goes on, she gets more and more acclimated to the events. The chemistry between Parker and Willis was excellent...probably the best I've seen from him since he was paired with Amanda Peet in "The Whole Nine Yards" (another amusing Action Comedy...just not near the action you see here).

The film also makes use of some very good supporting roles. Top amongst these is Karl Urban (McCoy in "Star Trek") as Cooper, the CIA killer trying to track down Frank & Crew. I especially liked how the writers did not make Cooper out to be a caricature, even though that's how it first looks. If you remember Urban from his role as the cold blooded killer in "The Bourne Supremacy", you'd think he is going to be playing the same role...but that's not the case.

Also well used are Brian Cox as a hilarious Russian spy, Rebecca Pidgeon (she's allowed to act in a movie not written by her husband David Mamet?) as Cooper's slippery CIA boss, Richard Dreyfus playing another smarmy villain, and Ernest Borgnine as the old timer in charge of the super-secret CIA vault of records (I'll admit it...I was shocked when I saw Ernest on the previews. I thought he died years ago).

The plot itself is relatively intelligent; at least for the genre. It doesn't go off too far into the land of disbelief (like the final scene of "The A-Team"), but yet keeps you guessing all along without treating you like an idiot.

So is "Red" a great movie? Of course not. If you are paying any attention at all, you can predict 75% of what's going to happen...but the fun part is in getting to where you expect it to be using a path that you didn't see coming.

And it is funny. Not gut busting laughs, but lots of smiles, plenty of giggles, and several loud chortles.

A very worthwhile diversion for two hours.

My Rating – Frank Ryan (3 Footballs).