



In my [Crystal Ball for January](#) , I warned that this month was shaping up to be one of the worst I'd ever seen in terms of quality movies. But at that time, I at least held out hope for a couple of films. One of them was “The Way Back”, an attempt for an epic “escape” film about six men held in a Siberian Gulag who escaped, and walked all the way to India, a journey of 4,000 miles.

It was directed by Peter Weir, the great director from such films as “Witness”, “The Truman Show”, and “Dead Poets Society”, and had a terrific cast with Colin Farrell, Ed Harris, and young Saoirse Ronan, so I had high hopes.

It was a complete bore, and totally unworthy of wasting one more sentence about.

So that was one of my two “Movies That I’m Anticipating” for the month. The other was the action adventure “The Mechanic”, a remake of the not-so-classic 1972 film starring Charles Bronson and Jan-Michael Vincent.

And like the Cleveland Cavaliers; I am now 0 for January.

I was hoping that the combination of Jason Statham, Ben Foster, and Donald Sutherland would be enough to elevate this movie to at least a status of “popcorn fun”, but it just wasn’t to be. The biggest problem with the film has to do with a word from my last sentence that is completely lacking in this film: Fun. This movie has fewer chuckles than you got from sitting through the post-apocalyptic downer “The Road”, combined with wooden characters, stilted dialog, ludicrous plot devices and a totally predictable ending.

Which is a shame, as the entire concept had so much potential. Statham plays Arthur Bishop, a killer-for-hire, but one who only seems interested in taking assignments to kill “bad people”, like drug lords, rouge agents, or pedophilic murdering preachers. In other words; he’s Dexter...just with the backing of a shady corporation who picks out his targets. Sutherland plays his long time mentor, Harry McKenna, a wheel chair bound version of the same character he played in “The Italian Job”.

After the most obvious plot development, Bishop finds himself becoming a mentor to Harry’s troubled son Steve, played by Ben Foster. Steve has some issues; anger and alcoholism being the two most prominent, which makes him an unlikely partner to the meticulous Bishop. No matter; we’re soon deep into a “Karate Kid” knock off with Bishop playing Mr. Miyagi to Steve’s Daniel-san, as he gives the younger man seeming menial tasks to perform that end up being a set up for Steve’s first hit.

All of this must end up going somewhere...and if you can’t figure out where that place will be within five seconds of them showing Bishop with Harry’s replacement, played by perennial smarmy heavy Tony Goldwyn (the bad guy in “Ghost”), then it’s clear that you’ve never before watched an action movie. Of course, they also choose to “ruin the surprise” by showing in the trailers that Goldwyn’s character Dean is the exact opposite of the saintly Harry. I somehow got

over the disappointment of having that surprised spoiled for me.

I might forgive all of this if the stalking and killing of the scummy victims was at least interesting...but it wasn't. The scenes were either totally unimaginative or else idiotic in the impossibility of the circumstances. All in all, they just served one purpose; to end up having as many bloody, gory scenes as possible. Screwdriver stabbings, harpoons in the back of knees, strangling a fat man with a viewing scope...all done so badly that the writers from "Dexter" need to find the writers from this film and bitchslap them into next week.

And then there is the acting; which was another disappointment given the cast. But I really can't blame Statham, Foster, and Sutherland, all of whom range from very good to great actors. The fault is almost entirely in the writing and directing. The chemistry between Bishop and Steve is non-existent. I never once believed that these two were "a team", and consequently I didn't care what happened to them. Individually, Steve is such a jerk that you really don't give a rat's patootie if he lives or dies. As far as Bishop goes, director Simon West has Statham play the character so mysterious and guarded that you end up knowing nothing about him...and consequently you just can't identify with him.

This is a big miss when it comes to movies with killers as the "heroes"; the killers have to appear very sympathetic. Think; Dexter, León from "The Professional", Jules and Vincent from "Pulp Fiction"...hell, even Timothy Olyphant in "Hitman" was more sympathetic and likable.

It honestly looks like Simon West is someone who has lost his touch when it comes to being in the director's chair. He started out his movie career with three relatively successful, if not artistic, films with "Con Air", "The General's Daughter" and "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider", but hasn't had anything decent since 2001.

All I know is that the only unique and interesting thing I can take from this movie is that for the first time in at least the last 20 years that I remember, the director used a totally flat chested woman for the gratuitous nudity scene with Bishop and a hooker, rather than the usual surgically enhanced freak of nature. And Bishop gives her a puppy later. How sweet.

My Rating – Derek Anderson (1 football) Piss-poor. Frustrating to the level of throwing objects at the screen.

