

FILM REVIEW: Brain-Altered Convict Chases International Terrorists in 'Criminal'



Kevin Costner, Freddy Bosche and Emmanuel Imani star in 'Criminal,' which is out in theaters nationwide.

By Kam Williams
For The Skanner News

CIA Agent Bill Pope (Ryan Reynolds) was in London on assignment to deliver a ransom to a computer hacker called the "The Dutchman" (Michael Pitt) when he was assassinated en route by a terrorist (Jordi Molla) with a vicious gun moll (Antje Traue). This would ordinarily be a big loss for the Agency, given the veteran spy's talents and abilities.

Luckily, government scientist Dr. Franks has been working on transferring memories from one brain to another. And while he's been successful in several attempts with animals, he considers himself five years away from being ready for human trials.

Nevertheless, given the emergency, he is instructed to immediately implant Pope's mind into that of Jericho (Kevin Costner), a death-row inmate in desperate need of a new lease on life. Next thing you know, the psychopathic murderer awakens from the experimental surgery raring to track down The Dutchman as well as the creeps who killed Pope.

That is the point of departure of "Criminal," a sci-fi splatterfest directed by Ariel Vromen (The Ice Man). Curiously, the movie marks Ryan Reynolds' third venture into the brain swap genre, his previous being last fall's Self/less. There,

however, he played the recipient rather than the organ donor.

There isn't much point to my reciting the scatterplot storyline, since it makes even less sense than the picture's farfetched premise. Still, this high body-count, action thriller is apt to have a certain appeal to testosterone-sodden males seeking to satiate their blood lust by watching folks being blown away in spectacular fashion.

In the process, the film fritters away the services of an impressive cast which includes Reynolds, Tommy Lee Jones, Gary Oldman and Kevin Costner. The film features a fair amount of eye candy, too, in Antje Traue, Alice Eve, Natalie Burn and Gal Gadot who plays Pope's widow, Jill. As you might easily imagine, she and her daughter, Emma (Lara Decaro), are in for the surprise of their lives when hubby/daddy returns reincarnated as a redeemed convict in need of a loving family.

A novel enough spin on the brain switch theme to recommend, provided you're very willing to suspend disbelief and you've got a strong stomach for senseless gore.

Good ★★

Rated R for pervasive profanity and graphic violence.

Running time: 113 minutes

Distributor: Summit Entertainment

FILM REVIEW: Saldana Successfully Channels Simone in Controversial 'Nina'

By Kam Williams
For The Skanner News

Most of the pre-release buzz surrounding "Nina" has swirled around the debate about Zoe Saldana's darkening her skin, donning an Afro wig and wearing a prosthetic nose to portray Nina Simone (1933-2003). Apparently, in these politically-correct times, some consider the casting of Saldana as the dark-skinned title character to be a case of cultural appropriation, since she is of Dominican and Puerto Rican extraction and thus, by implication, not black enough to play an African-American.

The beleaguered actress was so beat up in the press that she's even publicly acknowledged the issue, admitting "I didn't think I was right for the part." However, I suspect anyone who actually sees the film would find Zoe's Africanized features to be less of a distraction than her singing.

For, while she certainly manages to hold her own, Nina's fans will un-



'Nina' opens this week with mixed reviews

doubtedly be more disappointed by the absence of the haunting strains of The High Priestess of Soul's distinctive voice than by her impersonator's performing in blackface. Again and again, it's frustrating to have to settle for second-rate renditions of such Simone classics as "My Baby Just Cares for Me," "Feeling Good," "Black Is the Colour," "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," "I Put a Spell on You," and "Why? (The King of Love Is Dead)."

Thankfully, Zoe does a better job in the acting half of the role, convincingly capturing Nina's mercurial personality, from the imperious air, to the violent mood swings, to the substance abuse, to the bouts of depression and

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