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Vantage Point - DVD

Crystal clear or wide of the mark?

by Neil Queen published on 1 August 2008

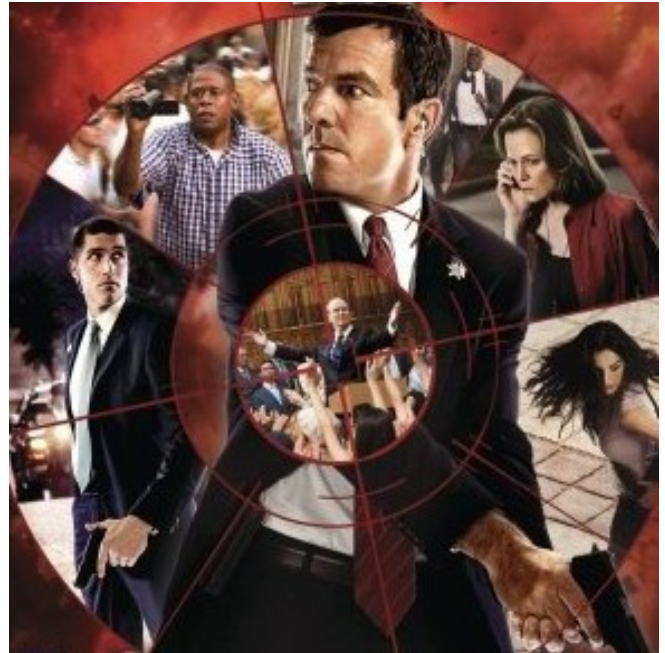
It's curious to see how Hollywood acts as a barometer to the American psyche. In the aftermath of 9/11, it was clear that would be too raw a topic to cover, until 2006's World Trade Center eased it onto screens by way of tribute to the fallen.

Now it seems that there is total freedom to use it as entertainment - Cloverfield basically reenacted the Manhattan attack, and now Vantage Point is the latest to use the threat of terrorism as a jump off, though here social commentary doesn't appear to be high on the agenda.

While at an anti-terrorism conference in Spain, US president Ashton (William Hurt) is shot by a marksman, before a bomb causes carnage and confusion in the city. Using the news coverage as a starting point, the events before and after the attack unfurl, as the film shifts from the different viewpoints of the people involved, with Ashton's trusted bodyguard Barnes (Dennis Quaid) leading the hunt for the assassin.

As mentioned, the atrocity is used less for comment, than as an angle for the titular narrative device - the intent being to provide a cubist approach to subjective perception of reality (gulp), to create a complete truth from a number of half truths. Using Kurasawa's Rashomon template of telling one story from multiple vantage points in this case sadly serves to hamper the film, rather than elevate it. Focusing on the 20 minutes or so of the attack, the film goes through a series of elaborate rewinds to emphasise the skews, which, as it covers such a short span starts to feel a bit like Groundhog Day.

It requires a bit of savvy to make it work, something that Vantage Point is lacking in. The repetition needed to be fleshed out with nuance provided by the direction, script and performances, but all of those fall short - the



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characterisation in particular is a problem. All formula outlines and no shading, the shallowness jars with the subject. And Forest Whitaker's slack-jawed tourist, who just so happens to have filmed all the key moments and seems more clued up than the secret service, is more than a bit on the incredulous side.

Fortunately, it's that same incredulity that rescues Vantage Point. Having pootled along for the first two-thirds, it explodes in a huge clusterf*** of breakneck action. A thankful head rush ensues which rewards your patience - car chases, violence, killings, a bit of Metal Gear Solid stealth action, the kitchen sink and even the spatula and colander are thrown in for good measure.

Having noodled for far too long with a concept that, though sound, isn't that impressive, it finally puts its action cinema eggs in one basket - fortunately, they managed to make a decent enough omelette out of it.

VERDICT

A neat idea that could have been an engaging, thoughtful actioner, but instead one that feels like a missed opportunity.

Rating: 12

Starring: Dennis Quaid, William Hurt, Forest Whitaker, Matthew Fox

Directed by: Pete Travis

Extras: Deleted scene, director commentary, featurettes.

At a glance

What is it?

Psychological thriller

Good

A high-concept, intriguing take on the action thriller

Bad

It isn't half as smart as it thinks it is

Verdict

A neat idea that could have been an engaging, thoughtful actioner, but instead one that feels like a missed opportunity

Price 19.99 / £24.99 Blu-ray

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10