

Blu-Ray Review: Bill Nighy's 'Wild Target' Completely Misses the Mark

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CHICAGO – There's no good way to discuss "Wild Target," except in hushed tones and somber expulsions of regret. It's a crime comedy that steals ninety-eight minutes of your life without delivering a single decent laugh. How could Bill Nighy, Emily Blunt, Rupert Grint, Martin Freeman and Eileen Atkins possibly have been attracted to this material, other than by force?

The problems begin with director Jonathan Lynn, who still has only two good comedies to his name: 1992's "My Cousin Vinny" and 2000's "The Whole Nine Yards." I'd classify Lynn's 1992 directorial debut "Clue" as a guilty pleasure, probably because I couldn't get enough of it when I was twelve. But even in my youth, I could detect that Lynn had a knack for turning large amounts of talent into lackluster set dressing, which is precisely what he does in "Wild Target."



Blu-Ray Rating: **1.0/5.0**

Nighy stars as Victor Maynard, the latest in an unending series of cheeky hitmen designed to attract audience empathy at the multiplex. Like Ben Affleck's good-hearted bank robber in "The Town," Victor has merely entered the family business, thus illustrating that his killer instinct is a result of nurture rather than nature. He's also quite lonely (poor dear) when he begins to find himself attracted to the girl he's been assigned to kill: Rose (Blunt). She's first seen blissfully bicycling through busy intersections, leaving behind a trail of five-car pileups. After her attempts to outwit a group of thugs goes horribly awry, Victor jumps in to save the day, declaring himself to be a private detective. One wonders how this script would have sounded if it had been written by Lynn back in the glory days of his BBC comedies "Yes Minister" and "Yes, Prime Minister." Sadly, Lynn stopped writing scripts altogether after 1990's embarrassing "Nuns on the Run," opting for a career in the director's chair. Most of the scripts he's directed have been awful, and Lucinda Coxon's thoroughly uninspired adaptation of Pierre Salvadori's 1993 French farce "Wild Target" is no exception. She hastily pairs her two leads before instantly throwing in a young sidekick, Tony (Grint), who conveniently has no where to go, thus freeing him up to join the duo at Victor's plastic-wrapped house.



Wild Target was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on Feb. 8, 2011.

Photo credit: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment

It's a bad sign when a comedy opens with a talking parrot gag, since talking parrots officially stopped being funny sometime around 1958's "Wild Women of Wongo." The comedy never rises above the level of cartoonish slapstick and hopelessly flat one liners such as "You like plastic covers...I bet condoms don't bother you either." Coxon's script is never more laughable than when it tries to be serious, such as when the wholly incompatible Victor and Rose fall in love after he gives her a foot massage. Victor's obsessive need for order in his life predictably inspires Rose to deliver a third act monologue where she pleads for him to loosen up. "Your life is so safe it's dangerous!" she wails. I'd like to assemble a montage of films that include a monologue identical to this one (a YouTube video of these sequences would be infinitely more entertaining to watch than this slick exercise in tedium).

It's flat out depressing to see such appealing actors attempting to inject wit and poignance into such a laughless enterprise. Nighy has been doing great work for decades, but he seduced the world with his unforgettable comic turn in 2003's "Love Actually." He also pulled off the seemingly difficult task of appearing to be a probable love interest for Kelly Macdonald in David Yates's wonderful 2005 TV movie, "The Girl in the Café." Here, Nighy is unable to generate any palpable chemistry with Blunt, primarily because there's no spark in the dialogue. Though Grint proved in "Deathly Hallows Part I" that he was the young star of the "Potter" franchise with the greatest range and potential, "Target" requires him to do the same whiny, pouty shtick he's been doing since he was a kid mugging for the camera. There simply isn't any part of this picture that's worth recommending. The best part is when it's over.

"Wild Target" is presented in flawless 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio) that only magnifies the film's countless flaws. The single extra is a three-minute interview with Blunt, who clearly saw the project solely as a chance to work again in England. She defends Rose's careless behavior with the lame explanation that, "she's searching for a connection in the world," which is a nice way of saying that her character is narcissistic and insufferable. Unfortunately, Blunt spends most of her precious minutes summarizing the film's plot, as if the plot weren't obvious enough.

'Wild Target' is released by Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment and stars Bill Nighy, Emily Blunt, Rupert Grint, Rupert Everett, Martin Freeman, Gregor Fisher and Eileen Atkins. It was written by Lucinda Coxon and directed by Jonathan Lynn. It was released on Feb. 8, 2011. It is rated PG-13.



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