

Vincent Cassel Gives Riveting Performance in 'Mesrine: Killer Instinct'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 26, 2010 - 8:36pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The film around its riveting central performance may be a little more flawed than the entire project's international reputation would have you believe but Vincent Cassel alone makes a trip to "Mesrine: Killer Instinct" worth the time and emotional effort. Be warned that this is not a crime epic for the faint of heart and those who have difficulty with an anti-hero protagonist may be turned off but those attuned to this kind of storytelling will find a lot to like here.

Directed by Jean-Francois Richet from a script that he co-wrote with Abdel Raouf Dafri, "Mesrine: Killer Instinct" is the first half of a pair of crime epics that have been incredibly successful over the last several years in France and other European countries. (The second half is "Mesrine: Public Enemy #1" which we will cover in this space next week.) The films episodically tell the life story of the legendary Jacques Mesrine (Vincent Cassel), an internationally famous criminal responsible for dozens of bank robberies and murders in the '60s and '70s.



Mesrine: Killer Instinct

Photo credit: Music Box Films

The "Mesrine" films have obvious thematic commonalities with Michael Mann's "Public Enemies" in that they merge to highlight the major events from the saga of a larger-than-life figure who became a household name through his evil ways. However, Richet doesn't have the same attention to detail or notable skill as Mann or others who have tackled this very-challenging genre. It's difficult to make a loathsome human being worth watching and Richet sometimes drops that ball.

Lucky for him, he cast one of the best French actors alive to pick it up. Cassel, who has stolen scenes in a diverse line-up of films that include "Eastern Promises," "Ocean's Twelve," "Crimson Rivers," "Irreversible," and "La Haine" (and will be seen again soon in Darren Aronofsky's highly anticipated "Black Swan"), gives the best performance of his career, bringing his prodigious charisma to carry the film. His work here has won several international awards and it's a stunner — charming, riveting, and perfect. He alone makes the film worth seeing.

"Killer Instinct" opens with what one assumes is the end of "Public Enemy #1" as an overweight-and-older Mesrine is planning an escape that looks like it's about to go very badly. It then flashes back to the '50s to a younger Mesrine serving in Algeria and confronted with an ugly, violent situation involving torture. Mesrine makes a quick decision that hints that this is a man who knows how to handle himself when it comes to violence.



Mesrine: Killer Instinct

Photo credit: Music Box Films

When he gets home, he tries to find a straight life but is constantly attracted to the world of crime. Over and over again. The episodic structure of "Killer Instinct" is one of the film's flaws in that it contains very few surprises. Every time Mesrine tries to "go straight," we know that he's merely buying time before he returns to a life of crime.

Having said that, "Mesrine: Killer Instinct" ends with a powerful collection of scenes that more than amply set-up the second outing including a ridiculously effective prison break sequence that easily stands as the highlight of the film. It's hard to claim that one sequence alone makes a film worth seeing but when you merge it with Cassel's incredible work, the two elements make it easier to see why the film jumped across the pond with such deafening buzz.

"Mesrine: Killer Instinct" stars Vincent Cassel, Cecile de France, Gerard Depardieu, Gilles Lellouche, Roy Dupuis and Elena Anaya. It was written by Abdel Raouf Dafri and Jean-Francoise Richet and directed by Richet. "Mesrine: Killer Instinct" opens in Chicago at Landmark Century Centre Cinema and in Evanston, Ill. at Landmark Evanston 18 on Aug. 27, 2010. The film is not rated.



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