

Violent, Extreme Crime Saga of ‘Mesrine: Public Enemy #1’ With Vincent Cassel

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 2, 2010 - 10:45pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – When we last left Jacques Mesrine in “Mesrine: Killer Instinct,” he was robbing banks, killing cops, and escaping from jail. In “Mesrine: Public Enemy #1,” Jacques Mesrine robs banks, kills cops, and escapes from jail. The second half of the “Mesrine” saga contains most of the same strengths and flaws as its predecessor and one has to wonder if the two films couldn’t have been merged into a stronger and more accomplished single project.

While I would never suggest merging and truncating the “Kill Bill” films or the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, there’s enough repetitive detail in the “Mesrine” films that I truly believe there’s a stronger version that runs about three hours as opposed to the over-four that these two films run combined. Vincent Cassel still simply rocks in the title role and his work alone makes it worth a trip to the arthouse this Labor Day Weekend but “Public Enemy #1” proves the theory that a film must be more than the sum of its parts. These movies both have some great parts but the sum is less than a masterpiece.



Mesrine: Public Enemy #1

Photo credit: Music Box Films

Just as “Killer Instinct” detailed the rise to criminal prominence of Jacques Mesrine (Vincent Cassel), “Public Enemy #1” details his trying to stay out of the line of sight of the powers that be. Mesrine is constantly being captured by the police, being imprisoned, and escaping. At one point, he even pulls a gun in a crowded courtroom and takes a judge hostage. For the majority of the middle act of ‘Public Enemy #1,’

Mesrine runs for freedom with a fellow escapee (Mathieu Amalric of "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly") until he runs all the way into the arms of the stunning Sylvia (Ludivine Sagnier of "Swimming Pool"). One of the sexiest actresses alive would make any man want to stay out of prison.

But the Sylvia-Jacques meeting is perfectly indicative of the problems with "Mesrine: Public Enemy #1." A bald-and-fat Mesrine follows Sylvia into a bar and the two introduce themselves to each other. In the next scene, she's straddling him and we just have to accept that this man has an unspoken power over everyone he encounters. That Cassel is a charismatic enough actor to nearly make that fact seem realistic is a testament to his skill not to an episodic script that never develops the depth to make the characters feel more than two-dimensional.



Mesrine: Public Enemy #1

Photo credit: Music Box Films

Once again, director Jean-Francois Richet and co-writer Abdel Raouf Dafri work in an extremely episodic manner. From courtroom to prison to freedom and back again, "Public Enemy #1" and "Killer Instinct" are both too ambitious and not quite enough. It would have been incredible for someone to distill the story of one of France's most notorious criminals into one complex film or perhaps a series of films could have been made but this two-parter feels like both too much in that it's repetitive without being deep and too little in that we don't spend enough time with the supporting characters for them to register.

Richet is clearly a talented filmmaker. The action set-pieces, including a street shoot-out with the police and another prison escape, are remarkably well-done. Visually, the film crackles with life and I can't underplay the strength of Cassel's great performance. But, ultimately, "Mesrine: Public Enemy #1" is essentially just a series of incredibly well-designed and choreographed action set-pieces. It's a film filled with memorable moments that ultimately isn't memorable enough as a whole.

"Mesrine: Public Enemy #1" stars Vincent Cassel, Mathieu Amalric, Ludivine Sagnier, and Anne Consigny. It was written by Abdel Raouf Dafri and Jean-Francoise Richet and directed by Richet. The film opens in Chicago at Landmark Century Centre Cinema and in Evanston, Ill. at Landmark Evanston 18 on September 3rd, 2010. The film is not rated.



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