

Gina Carano, Ewan McGregor in Steven Soderbergh's 'Haywire'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 19, 2012 - 3:45pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Steven Soderbergh is one of the few directors who can do whatever the hell he wants. Whatever genre, whomever he casts, whichever story he chooses to tell – he pulls it off. He hasn't made anything approaching a stumble since 2004's "Ocean's Twelve" (and, believe it or not, there have been eight films released since including this one) and his latest, "Haywire," serves as further evidence that any conversation of the best working directors that doesn't include him is incomplete. The film is ultimately a bit too thin for its own good, and you've seen nearly the entirety of it in the over-saturated previews, but it's yet-another tightly-directed, expertly-made work from a director who seems to know no other way.

"Haywire" opens with a beautiful woman named Mallory (Gina Carano, an MMA fighter for whom Soderbergh and writer Lem Dobbs reportedly built this film around) scoping out a snow-covered restaurant. She cases it from a distance, moves in slowly, and slides into a booth. Aaron (Channing Tatum), a man with whom she clearly has a past enters the restaurant and sits across from her. After some tense, mysterious conversation that doesn't make a whole lot of sense, Aaron throws a hot cup of coffee in Mallory's face and the two start fighting. And I mean FIGHTING. They punch. They kick. They throw each other into booths and stools. And this is one of those films where you feel every blow. It's the opposite of the modern trend of quick-cut, confusing action choreography.



Haywire

Photo credit: Relativity Media

Before you can recover from the brutality of the first fight, Mallory has ordered a young man named Scott (Michael Angarano) to help her escape. Mallory is driving, Scott is tending her wounds. It's the perfect time for a story! Our heroine tells Scott how she got to this position and reveals why they need to be headed to their current destination.

Mallory worked as a secret agent for hire under the leadership of the shady Kenneth (Ewan McGregor), who also happened to be her ex. It's never a good situation when deadly people break up. Two men named Coblenz (Michael Douglas) and Rodrigo (Antonio Banderas) come to Kenneth with a job – releasing a hostage from his captivity in Barcelona. They demand that the legendary Mallory be a part of the job and we learn that Aaron the coffee hurler was also on the team. Things got a little shaky in Barcelona, but they got their man and seemingly got away smooth. When Mallory went on her next mission, an undercover gig involving the freelance British agent Paul (Michael Fassbender), all hell broke loose. Now, Mallory is on the run and her famous author father (Bill Paxton) may be the only person who can help her.

Not like Mallory needs much help. As crafted by the great writer Dobbs ("Dark City," "The Limey"), she is a heroine for which the viewer rarely fears actual danger. It's quite a compliment to the way this character is designed and the way she's brought to life by Carano and Soderbergh that she approaches James Bond or Jason Bourne level supremacy in that, even with seemingly formidable opponents like Fassbender and Tatum, one knows she will always come out on top. She is a force of nature, a woman who doesn't just hold her own, she holds yours too.



Haywire

Photo credit: Relativity Media

But to what end? Is "Haywire" more than a remarkable technical exercise? Not really. Much like Lars Von Trier, Soderbergh seems to occasionally make films that are designed to test and expand his boundaries as a filmmaker. Can I make a movie about a high-end escort ("The Girlfriend Experience")? Can I make a movie about making movies ("Full Frontal")? Can I make a movie with no names for virtually nothing and find new ways to distribute it ("Bubble")? While the all-star, A-list supporting cast might make this look like one of his mainstream ventures (like "Contagion" or the "Oceans" movies), it is actually MUCH closer to his experimental work in its lack of character and newcomer lead. Are we supposed to care about Mallory Kane? Are we supposed to be intrigued by the plot? Not really to both questions. Everything about "Haywire" feels like an experiment in filmmaking more than honest spy movie storytelling.

But what remarkable filmmaking. It literally seems like there's nothing that this man can't do. A spy movie built around a debut actress? Sure, why not? And he doesn't just deliver the basics. He delivers stunningly well-choreographed chase and fight scenes. The battle between Mallory and Paul is incredible and the climax in which Mallory's betrayer is finally caught up to is fantastic. It's the connective tissue that leaves "Haywire" a little thin. But it also leaves it a lean action machine that runs less than an hour-and-a-half with credits. Carano and Soderbergh get in, kick your ass, and get out. He doesn't have time for traditional plot and character. He's too busy moving on to the next project.

"Haywire" stars Gina Carano, Ewan McGregor, Channing Tatum, Michael Angarano, Michael Douglas, Bill Paxton, Michael Fassbender, and Antonio Banderas. It was written by Lem Dobbs and directed by Steven Soderbergh. It will be released on January 20th, 2012.



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