

Jeremy Renner Propels Clever ‘The Bourne Legacy’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 9, 2012 - 10:18am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Tony Gilroy’s world of double crosses, super spies, and covert government programs returns in the writer/director’s clever expansion of the world he created as the writer of “The Bourne Identity,” “The Bourne Supremacy,” and “The Bourne Ultimatum.” The Oscar winner doesn’t just offer a traditional sequel, presenting a new leading man and a story that takes place in the same world of international espionage as its predecessors but feels more like a spin-off than a follow-up. To that end, there are some elements of “The Bourne Legacy” that feel a bit too much like the less-accomplished sibling of a successful older brother but not enough to offset what truly does work about this smart, engaging thriller.

As the tag line says, “*There was never just one.*” While Jason Bourne (Matt Damon in the first three movies, who is seen only in pictures here) is busy with his own action on the other side of the world, another participant in the program that turned him into a super-spy is traversing snowy mountains filled with deadly wolves in an effort to reach safety and more of the medication he needs to keep him above average. Meet Aaron Cross (Jeremy Renner), a determined, old-fashioned action hero – the kind of direct, driven character that we don’t often see in Hollywood films any more. The lack of background in Cross could be seen as either a lack of depth in the character (and, therefore, a flaw) or a streamlined approach to action. I found Renner and Gilroy’s approach refreshing as they give Cross just enough three-dimensionality to make his driven approach worth watching and can expand on the character in future installments.



The Bourne Legacy

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Where’s Aaron Cross going? He’s trying to save his own life. It turns out that the program that created Cross and Bourne is being burned to the ground before it can hit the public eye. In back rooms, nefarious government types like Col. Eric Byer (Edward Norton), Ezra Kramer (Scott Glenn), and Admiral Mark Turso (Stacy Keach) try to track down everyone involved in the human experiment and eliminate them with due diligence. (Recognizable faces from the rest of the “Bourne” movies like Albert Finney, David Strathairn, and Joan Allen have little more than cameos.) As more bodies keep falling, Cross eventually teams up with Dr. Marta Shearing (Rachel Weisz), one of the physical architects of the program and someone else that people like Byer want dead. Cross and Shearing probably wouldn’t make it on their own but they just might survive if they stick together.

Knowing that the actual meat of “The Bourne Legacy” takes a little while to reveal itself (Renner & Weisz aren’t together until well into the second act), Gilroy and his team attempt to create thrills through confusion for most of the opening arc of their film. As Cross is meeting with a fellow spy (a great turn by Oscar Isaac) in a cottage in the middle of snowy nowhere, Byer and his fellow government villains are trying to clean up their mess, and Shearing is going through her routine in her lab, audiences are likely to greet the material with a raised eyebrow and confused stare. The opening act of “The Bourne Legacy” is light on action (even with a well-stage scene involving a drone trying to blow Cross up with a missile) and heavy on baffling code names. It’s a dialogue-driven film through and through and if viewers go to it looking for non-stop action, they’re going to be disappointed.

However, if you remember that Gilroy’s gift is with dialogue & plot (in films like “Michael Clayton” and “Duplicity”) and not action than your expectations will be solidly met. “The Bourne Legacy” is tight, engaging, and never boring. It’s a 135-minute film that simply zips by to a somewhat disappointing and abrupt ending. Not to spoil anything but this is one of those films that seems like the first act of a trilogy. It doesn’t really have a solid conclusion in any way but ask yourself when the last time you saw a Hollywood movie that ran over two hours that you were surprised to see was over and weren’t just hoping that the credits would roll soon. After that somewhat awkward opening act – once Renner & Weisz get together – “The Bourne Legacy” simply flies by.



The Bourne Legacy

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

As for performances, everyone here is stellar. I wish Renner had been given a few more chances to inject personality into Cross as he is in a few key scenes (the ones with Isaac and a few later ones with Weisz) but the script doesn’t really allow it. Perhaps in the sequel. Weisz is typically fantastic after she’s allowed to get over a few “screaming, yelling, panic” scenes that don’t quite work. And Norton is stellar in his buttoned-up bad guy role even if he too isn’t quite given the arc Hollywood movie goers will expect.

What is “The Bourne Legacy”? Is it the start of another franchise or an expansion of an old one? Is it a spy drama or an action blockbuster? The identity crisis, lack of an ending, and comparatively less action could lead some people to view it as a disappointment but there’s too much here that works – Gilroy’s crisp dialogue, the performances, all of the technical elements – to dismiss it as easily as some critics already have. Sure, it’s not the best of the series (that would be “Supremacy”) but it is easily as solid a start to a new franchise as “The Bourne Identity.” Think of it as the transition film. I look forward to seeing what Aaron Cross does next.

“The Bourne Legacy” stars Jeremy Renner, Rachel Weisz, Edward Norton, Stacy Keach, Scott Glenn, Oscar Isaac, Donna Murphy, Corey Stoll, and Zeljko Ivanek. It was written and directed by Tony Gilroy. It is rated PG-13 and opens on August 10, 2012.



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