

## Hacker Thriller ‘Blackhat’ Has a Finger on the Enter Key

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on January 16, 2015 - 7:23pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – A speedy film project can take about a year from conception to final cut; director Michael Mann’s wired-in thriller “Blackhat” might as well have been written, shot, and cut last month. Not just because of its epilogue to the rise and defeat of the Guardians of Peace, but for its modernity. This is a tale of headline action specifically for January 16, 2015 and onward, in our new period of cyber terror.

A thoroughly international project that reckons China’s importance to the American industry, “Blackhat” is the story of a co-investigation between the United States and China. A Hong Kong nuclear power plant and Chicago’s Mercantile Trade Exchange have been attacked, nonetheless by a no-name, no-motive menace who has hacked into their systems. A Chinese official named Chen Dawai (Leehom Wang) works alongside cyberterrorism agents in the FBI (played by Viola Davis and John Ortiz) to track the menace’s previous coding. Dawai insists on enlisting the person who initially created the code found at the crime scene - his former MIT buddy Nicholas Hathaway (Chris Hemsworth), who is currently serving time in prison. When Hathaway negotiates that his assistance in capturing the hacker will lead to his release, “Blackhat” takes off as an international code-writing thriller, with this grab-bag team chasing code clues, in hopes of preventing the hacker and his heavily-armed team from unleashing even worse worldwide chaos.

Providing the main attraction most likely to woo viewers to “Blackhat” more immediately than the term cyberterrorism, Hemsworth is an agile fit for the new archetype of non-Zuckerberg hacker. He begins as a type of classic hero, playing mind games in order to achieve his furlough, all with a confident, John McClane-like smirk on his face. But as “Blackhat” assumes full form as an international hacker adventure, his energy is in tune with what can make Mann’s film great - the charisma to carry viewers through the movie’s 2.0 action of internet adventuring, navigating the fury within the world’s modern dangers. He is just as physical with a desktop keyboard as with his fists.



'Blackhat'

*Photo credit: Universal*

Writer Morgan Davis Foehl's script is motivated most of all by its country-hopping cat-and-mouse, not its desire for propping up characters. So while there is an excitement in seeing Ortiz and Davis embody sharp versions of stuffy FBI folk, they have little to do with putting the story in motion. Even its villain remains bland despite a Joker-esque appetite for chaos. He is at best a rough draft of a new foe for a new hero, a seed of paranoia that shows the possibility of terror in a world where we are intertwined. As he is sure to remind us, "the moment you connect, you lose control."

However one may feel about "Blackhat's" tourist trip through the underground of the internet, or the streams of blipping gibberish that the film rallies up to threats, "Blackhat" wallops with four action sequences that splendidly satiate genre demand, jumpstarting 2015 with a four separate shots to the heart. The dynamism within these chases, shootouts, and high-stakes scuffles comes from an explosive strength that's brawnier than simple muscle, but that of filmmaking - brutish sound design and claustrophobic cinematography tarp over its following sequences of keyboard mashing, completing the film's feeling as an anxious thriller. "Blackhat" installs its dread with vicious action, as the action genre rules continue to be bent on a multiplex stage.

"Blackhat" makes no bones about the center stimulations within the genre, and in providing them. An adrenaline romance between Hathaway and Dawai's sister Wei Tang (Lein Chen) plateaus, and at least one fisticuff folly feels like a producer's suggestion. Similarly, these super hackers aren't always at the peak of their sharpness, despite their ability to create and translate computer code as if it were sheet music. But while these elements might ring cheap in other films, they're a part of a picture much bigger here than plot holes.



‘Blackhat’

Photo credit: Universal

A thriller of both high-tech and low-tech spectacle, “Blackhat” sticks to its guns but adds keyboards to the genre, sometimes getting lost in its coding dialect, or confusing course of events. But similar to Steven Soderbergh’s kick-in-the-face “Haywire” (released at a similar time in January 2012), “Blackhat” takes advantage of the energy within genre conventions, composing an event that is earnestly and unmistakably now. In terms of structure, “Blackhat” may seem like a typical script, but it is one from the next era of action films.

*“Blackhat” opens everywhere on January 16th. Starring Chris Hemsworth, Leehom Wang, Viola Davis, Wei Tang, John Ortiz, Ritchie Coster, and William Mapother. Written by Morgan Davis Foehl. Directed by Michael Mann. Rated “R”*



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