

'xXx: Return of Xander Cage' is Action as Phantasm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The true miracle of “xXx: Return of Xander Cage” – besides constantly breaking the law of physics – was making the sonorous line readings of Vin Diesel almost palatable. This over-the-top action fantastic turns up every implausibility dial to the red zone, but satisfactorily entertains.

In this film, you will believe a man can ski without snow, shoot bullets in public without reaction or ramifications, wreck enough cars to affect the auto insurance actuary, free fall from 30,000 feet, and make love to a bevy of willing beauties even though he is clearly 20-25 years older than they are. I got to hand it to the production team, this is perfect escapism for this “historic” weekend and dreaded winter, and they had no shame in presenting impossible stunts and gunplay without winking. This is like a cinematic adrenalin shot.

The “Triple XXX” team – a rogue outside-the-law enforcement agency – is scattered throughout the world, but agent Augustus Gibbons (Samuel L. Jackson) is still out there recruiting. When a satellite falls through the atmosphere and kills Gibbons in Shanghai, CIA operatives capture a “Pandora’s Box” guidance system that presumably can control any satellite and use them to bomb any city in the world.



Serena (Deepika Padukone) Meets Xander (Vin Diesel) in 'xXx: Return of Xander Cage'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

While the CIA is having a meeting regarding the threat, it is infiltrated by a team led by Xiang (Donnie Yen), and the box is stolen. Operative Jane Marke (Toni Collette) is determined to find the presumed dead Xander Cage (Vin Diesel) of Triple XXX to recover Pandora. Once he is in place, and his team of bad asses (Rory McCann, Kris Wu and Ruby Rose) is behind him, the mission becomes Xanderized (for your protection).

This is the new evolution in action – directed by D.J. Caruso (“Eagle Eye”) – to make it complete fantasy, and there is nothing wrong with that. Why shouldn’t the new age of digital manipulation also reign true for all genres? “xXx” ups the ante, and they’ll even be hard pressed to outdo this one. There are laughs beyond the catch phrase jokes (which need some punching up), mostly at the outrageousness of it all, and wondering how the creators came up with this stuff. There are no rules anymore.

The cast is eager to please, and it’s one of diversity and internationalism (Thanks, Obama). Toni Collette – who has graduated from art movie performances – oddly has one expression the entire movie (perhaps a message to her agent?), but her presence in the story is perfectly welcomed, and there is hope she will be back. The bad ass Xander team is fun, even though the Scotsman’s power seems to be just wrecking cars, and the Asian guy is simply a good DJ. At least Ruby Rose can “Oswald” a sniper rifle.



You Will Believe a Man Can Motocross Underwater in 'xXx: Return of Xander Cage'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

A word about guns in the film – too many and too boring. The gunfire is constant, without any major injuries (I believe the Scotsman took some bullets toward the end, but came out okay in the next scene). Both armies – the Russkies and the Yankees – have a Stormtrooper-like uselessness when Xanderized, you’d think that the USA could be number one at least in fiction.

During one of the action breaks (I believe it’s when Xander emerges from the sea), there was a requisite “tattoo comparison” between Vin Xanderdiesel and the opposition female Serena (Deepika Paduone), that ends up in a close-up of the Vinster’s nipple tattoo. After all, this is Triple XXX!

“xXx: Return of Xander Cage” opens everywhere on January 20th. Featuring Vin Diesel, Donnie Yen, Toni Collette, Deepika Paduone, Rory McCann, Kris Wu and Ruby Rose. Written by F. Scott Frazier. Directed by D.J. Caruso. Rated “PG-13” (What! They showed his nipple!)



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