

## Kumail Nanjani is the Only Reason to See 'Stuber'

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Kumail Nanjani is reaching the next level of stardom. Recently, he was the best thing in the rebooted “MIB: International” (as a cartoon sprite), and now he is the only reason to indulge in “Stuber.” Kumail portrays a nervy UBER driver named Stu (get it?), and upholds everything about the buddy movie that is enjoyable. The rest of it, including his buddy Dave Bautista, land with a dull thud.

There was something there, but maybe it needed ten more rewrites or so. The lazy screenplay – by Tripper Clancy, I kid you not – seemed content with rehashing plots from the 1990s, as the Kumail/Bautista team pursuit an Asian martial artist running a heroin ring ... complete with exotic Asian branded drug packaging. But Kumail is blissful in his zen surrounding this illogical scenario, and gets off a few hilarious lines. The Über Critic Rule ... if it makes me laugh several times, it's worth seeing. We all need more laughs in this crazy, mixed up world.

Stu (Kumail Nanjani) has a day job as a clerk in a sporting goods store. To raise investment money for a spin class studio by his friend Becca (Betty Gilpin) he becomes an UBER driver in Los Angeles. To keep his leased car, he has to keep his rating over four stars (of five), and that's threatened when an L.A. police detective named Vic Manning (Dave Bautista) decides to take over his vehicle in pursuit of a case.



Vic (Dave Bautista) and Stu (Kumail Nanjiani) in 'Stuber'  
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

Oka Tedjo (Iko Uwais) is running a heroin ring in La La Land, and Vic is pursuing him because he killed his partner. But there are complications. Vic has been blinded by Lasik surgery and his needs to be at his daughter Nicole's (Natalie Morales) art show. Meanwhile, Stu is secretly in love with Becca, who wants him to come over for some rebound lovemaking. Will Stu maintain his UBER rating?

I can hear Eddie Murphy's distinctive laugh, as this seemed to be rejected script from "Yet Another 48 Hours." The plot was a not-the-good-kind joke, littered with stereotypes (yes, there was the Latino drug house), illogical holes (why doesn't Stu just drive away?) and ultra ultra gun violence (when writer Tripper got bored, he just had a bad guy shot in the head). And then Mira Sorvino appears for some reason. Kidding, she was the tough-but-benign police captain. That Oscar of hers must be gathering dust.

And then there is Dave Bautista, known primarily as Drax, the bald and muscled alien in "Guardians of the Galaxy." In human form, he looks like a thumb come to life. His acting skills are from the meat grinder school, "snarl all the lines." He is so unbelievable as a cop he softened Oscar-winner Sorvino's interpretation. He's lucky to have had Kumail, who could riff on the stupidity of the whole atmosphere.





Nicole (Natalie Morales) Joins Stu in 'Stuber'  
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

Finally, we come to the positive of the film, Kumail Nanjani is one funny mo-fo. His years on "Silicon Valley" has sharpened both his timing skills and the laconic persona he has developed for his brand of comedy. Although he endures the typical buddy comedy indoctrination – shooting a gun and getting into a prolonged fight with Drax – he survives to drop another laugh bomb. Seriously, this film would have been nothing without his contribution.

You could make a bingo card with the buddy comedy tropes in this film ... unlikely partner, exotic crime, turncoat police officers, accurate gunfire from people who have never shot guns, and my favorite, the buddy fight. It is an endless scene, painful in its length, while the whole damn movie is only 93 minutes long. Yeesh.

*"Stuber" opens everywhere on July 12th. Featuring Kumail Nanjani, Dave Bautista, Mira Sorvino, Natalie Morales, Betty Gilpin and Iko Uwais. Written by Tripper Clancy Directed by Michael Dowse. Rated "R" Guess what? This is the first R-Rated release since the Walt Disney Company acquired 20th Century Fox. Hi-Ho-Hi-Ho, indeed.*



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