

Stereotypical '3 Days to Kill' Tonally Uneven

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 21, 2014 - 4:10pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – As a director, Kevin Costner comes across as a patient guy who waits for the right material to come along. Considering the last movie he helmed is a little over ten years old (“Open Range”), one might also consider him picky too. As an actor, it feels like Costner woke up one recent morning and thought, “Hey, I should do a handful of movies in a row. I’m not getting any younger!” , which is why we had that “Jack Ryan” movie last month, “3 Days to Kill” this month and next month’s “Draft Day”, with two more movies still on their way this year. Hopefully he’s planning on taking 2015 off entirely.

It might help McG, the director of “3 Days to Kill”, to take a cue from Costner the director. Here’s a guy who definitely needs to choose his next project wisely. Granted, the man born Joseph McGinty Nichol has earned a significant amount of success producing such television hits as “Chuck” and “Supernatural”, his last theatrical endeavors left much to be desired. I bet you forgot he directed the romantic action comedy “This Means War”, from a couple years back and thought his last outing was the much-maligned “Terminator: Salvation”. You’re not alone.

Based on the trailers, “3 Days to Kill” felt like it could be an interesting downshift for the director, making a feature revolving around a grizzled protagonist and possibly involving some intriguing characterization. Well, not quite. McG should’ve been more picky with his partnerships, because the writing duo of Adi Hasak and Luc Besson (“From Paris with Love”) has overwhelmed this movie with a rote and lazy screenplay. It’s a script filled with proverbials and requisites, where one can’t help but think that it might have taken them 3 days to write such a lazy exercise in genre conventions.



Ethan Renner (Kevin Costner) is Cornered in '3 Days to Kill'

Photo credit: Relativity Media

Edging close to retirement, Ethan Renner (Kevin Costner) is a CIA network lifer who recently relocated to Paris to reconnect with his estranged wife, Christine (Connie Nielson) and teenage daughter, Zoe (Hailee Steinfeld). While tracking down stock terrorist types The Albino (Tómas Lemarquis) and The Wolf (Richard Sammel) - I kid you not, those are their names - Ethan is slowed down by a sudden debilitating illness which he soon learns is inoperable aggressive brain cancer. He's told he has about three months to live. This provides a perfect reason to settle down and appreciate the family he's missed for the past five years.

Something is going to prevent Ethan from kicking his killing habits cold turkey though or this wouldn't be an action thriller. That something comes in the form of an experimental drug, supplied by a young no-nonsense agent, Vivi Delay (a distractingly bland Amber Heard), who claims it can prolong his life. All he has to do is one last job: track down and kill that Albino and Wolf, for reasons unexplained. They're just bad guys that need to be stopped. Of course, Ethan accepts, knowing he has no other means to buy him more time and he soon finds himself balancing car chases and shootouts with his daughter's hormonal drama.

If this all sound so familiar, that's because it is. Major tropes converge throughout, like the "one last job" and the "deadbeat dad", peppered with "the dying dad longing to reconnect"; all of which offer groan-worthy results. Except for an odd subplot involving an African family (complete with cute young boy and a pregnant teen girl who's about to pop) squatting in Ethan's apartment, there's really nothing out of the ordinary (or extraordinary) here. "3 Days" is populated with the kind of tone-deaf humor and cheap sadism Besson is known for and therefore it feels more like one of his films than it does McG's.

That being said, McG does remind us how adept he is at offering action sequences that are cleverly choreographed and easy to follow. You won't find the same stylized action that his two "Charlies Angels" movies were known for and considering we're following a sick and old lead character, that's a relief. I found myself preferring the downtime moments between Costner and Steinfeld, both of whom worked off each other well to provide some palpable contention. As forced and cheesy as some of their scenes are, there's an apparent tenderness that the actors are mining that I found quite welcome.

Still, when we see Ethan trying to teach Zoe how to ride a bicycle and then later on instructing her on how to dance (in preparation for the prom - they have proms in France?), it feels forced and silly. I get that he wants to do anything to connect and she's playing "difficult teenager", but Ethan was only gone for five years of her life - so, she wouldn't have learned how to ride a bike before the preteen years? Am I missing something?

I couldn't help but think how these scenes are wedged into what's being marketed as an action flick. It is and it isn't and it certainly isn't what moviegoers will expect.



Vivi Delay (Amber Heard) in '3 Days to Kill'

Photo credit: Relativity Media

It must be mentioned that the lamest character in "3 Days" is Amber Heard's femme fatale. She truly feels like she's in a different movie. Like, maybe she auditioned for Frank Miller's "Sin City" and didn't make the cut, but kept all the [best celebrity wigs](#) [15], hair dyes and trashy outfits. Oh sure, this is a tough chick, who's got Ethan running around shooting bad guys (while coughing up blood), but who cares when we know literally nothing about her. To be honest, Heard is such a bad actress, that I found myself not caring that I couldn't connect to her character.

The undeniable comparisons to "Taken" (which Besson also had his hands in) are apt and expected. After all, this isn't too far off from that plot outline. It's just different enough, but also not enough.

As an unabashed Costner fan, I was bummed that "3 Days to Kill" didn't have better material for the actor to work with. He's still entertaining to watch, especially at his age, with more world-weariness and wrinkles. It's just unfortunate Costner the actor isn't as finicky as Costner the director.

"3 Days to Kill" opens everywhere on February 21st. Featuring Kevin Costner, Amber Heard, Connie Nielson, Hailee Steinfeld, Richard Sammel and Tómas Lemarquis. Screenplay by Luc Beeson and Adi Hasak. Directed by McG. Rated "PG-13"

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