

The Hitman's Bodyguard

USA/Bulgaria/The Netherlands/Canada 2017
 Director: Patrick Hughes
 Certificate 15 118m 10s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Admired enough to land a place on 2017's Black List, showcasing industry insiders' ranking of the year's best unproduced scripts, Tom O'Connor's screenplay for *The Hitman's Bodyguard* demonstrates, in its finished result, the benefit of a sturdy structure in an action-comedy assignment. From *48 Hrs* (1982) and *Midnight Run* (1988) to *Rush Hour* (1998), the value of an 'odd couple' approach – where seemingly mismatched characters must overcome their differences to achieve a common goal – has long been a working template, providing a strong, easily readable narrative through-line, ample opportunity for comic interplay, and the potential for real onscreen chemistry in the casting.

The tradition of playing uptight white guy against nonchalantly non-conformist black dude probably goes back at least as far as Messrs Wilder and Pryor in 1976's *Silver Streak*, but gets another amiable workout here. Detail-obsessed bodyguard Ryan Reynolds and serenely relaxed hired killer Samuel L. Jackson find their paths entwined, thanks to a tight, ticking-clock scenario whereby prisoner Jackson must be shepherded from the UK to the International Criminal Court in The Hague before sundry Eastern European nasties bump them off. Jackson will win release from an Amsterdam prison for his badass spouse Salma Hayek, Reynolds stands to repair things with his British secret-service ex-girlfriend and justice will prevail, provided Jackson's evidence helps to convict evil post-Soviet dictator Gary Oldman.

All of which sounds relatively straightforward, and the sort of unglamorous nuts-and-bolts construction that audiences aren't supposed to notice, but it ably serves its purpose here, allowing the two stars appreciable verbal jousting, predicated on the ironic notion that for all the deaths attributable to Jackson, he's a deeply romantic individual devoted to his wife and adamant that Reynolds must confess his failings to win back his own lost love.

Arguably, there's a bit too much of this, but



The aim game: Samuel L. Jackson, Ryan Reynolds

the leads are in their element, and any concern that Reynolds does not have the physical wherewithal to hold his own in the rough stuff is assuaged by convincing fight choreography. Indeed, a real highlight comes when the stunt team take over for a hair-raising chase through the Amsterdam canals, with motorbikes and cars in pursuit of Jackson's speeding motorboat, easily topping a similar, iconic sequence in Geoffrey Reeve's 1971 *Puppet on a Chain*.

Notwithstanding the high body count, director Patrick Hughes sustains an enjoyably jocular tone, mostly because the mayhem is so excessively absurd that we don't need to take it too seriously. There are, however, a couple of serious missteps, involving waterboarding and a devastating truck bomb, when this disposable time-passer gets far too real for its own good. Add to that a somewhat overlong running time (largely down to a bloated action finale) and you have a movie that largely delivers astute, empty-headed entertainment but is not without its exasperating snags along the way. A producer with the genre-savvy touch of primetime Joel Silver would surely have made it shorter, sharper and more coherent, and the filmmakers here might profitably have watched *The Last Boy Scout* (1991) to see how it's really done. Ⓢ

Hotel Salvation

Director: Shubhashish Bhutiani
 Certificate PG 101m 32s

Reviewed by

Naman Ramachandran

The concept of fatalism is alive and well in India, and Daya, the 77-year-old protagonist of *Hotel Salvation*, is certainly a proponent of it: after a premonitory dream, he demands that his accountant son Rajiv take him to the holy city of Varanasi, where thousands of Hindus go every year to die by the banks of the Ganges in the belief that their souls will gain eternal salvation. Unlike *Ikiru* (1952), whose bureaucrat protagonist found meaning in his life after being diagnosed with a terminal illness, Daya appears to be in rude health, yet simply accepts as a fact that his demise is imminent, and is prepared to wait it out calmly – traumatising his harried son in the meantime with his unreasonable demands.

Despite its rather grim premise, *Hotel Salvation* is that rarity – a film in which the events leading to its eventual and inevitable deaths are treated with sly, sometimes gallows humour. For example, as the taxi taking him and Rajiv from their hometown of Kannauj to Varanasi hurtles along the busy National Highway 19, Daya tells the driver that he'd rather die in the holy city than en route. Though death is a constant here, the pervasive wry tone elevates the film into a lighthearted but never frivolous study of the process of dying.

The film is, however, about much more than this. It is also a close look at a father-son relationship, of a piece with *Big Fish* (2003) or *Nebraska* (2013); a portrait of the average beleaguered Indian salaryman, as embodied by Rajiv, who has to juggle family commitments and a stressful job; and an examination of the Indian joint family system whereby, until their sojourn to Varanasi, Daya lives under the same roof as his middle-aged son, his daughter-in-law and his adult granddaughter. The dusty hotel at the centre of the story is a far cry from the colourful ones of the *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* films; though it is easy enough to peddle exotica in the riot of hues and images that is Varanasi, the visuals in *Hotel Salvation* are kept deliberately neutral.

The film is also a triumph of casting. Lalit Behl made a striking debut as the patriarch in 2014's *Titti*, and continues in that vein here, imbuing the role of a curmudgeonly elder with warmth and dignity. Geetanjali Kulkarni, who memorably played a public prosecutor in *Court* (2014), brings a sharp wit to her role as Rajiv's wife. Palomi Ghosh, best known for her tour de force as a jazz singer in *Nachom-ia Kumpasar* (2015), is effective as the granddaughter who wants to pursue her dreams but is caught in the slipstream of a complicated family. And Navnindra Behl makes an assured debut as Vimla, Daya's friend in the hotel. But it is Adil Hussain as Rajiv who is a revelation. He has been plugging away for years, making a quiet impression in films such as *Life of Pi* (2012) and *Tigers* (2014); in *Hotel Salvation* he is potent in an intricate role that requires him to be a dutiful son, a deferential employee and a caring father and husband all at the same time. Particularly poignant is the moment when it is revealed that his father beat his youthful hopes of becoming a poet out of him.

The most surprising aspect of a film as mature as *Hotel Salvation* is that its director, Shubhashish

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

John Thompson
 Matt O'Toole
 Les Weldon

Written by

Tom O'Connor

Director of

Photography

Jules O'Loughlin

Editor

Jake Roberts

Production Designer

Russell De Rozario

Music

Atli Örvarsson

Production

Sound Mixer

Antoin Cox

Costume Designer

Stephanie Collie

Production

Companies

Summit

Entertainment,

Millennium Media

present in association

with Cristal Pictures

and East Light

Media a Millennium

Media and a CG

Films production

A film by Patrick

Hughes

Executive Producers

Matt Milam

Chris Jing Liu

Scott Einbinder

Avi Lerner

Trevor Short

Boaz Davidson

Jason Bloom

Douglas Urbanski

Jeffrey Greenstein

Yariv Lerner

Mark Gill

Christine Otal

Christa Campbell

Lati Grobman

Cast

Ryan Reynolds

Michael Bryce

Samuel L. Jackson

Darius Kincaid

Gary Oldman

Vladislav Dukhovich

Salma Hayek

Sonia Kincaid

Elodie Yung

Amelia Rousset

Joaquim De Almeida

Foucher

Kirsty Mitchell

Rebecca Harr

Richard E. Grant

Seifert

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

London, several years ago. Michael Bryce is an organised, highly professional bodyguard with an impeccable reputation, until one day a Japanese businessman is assassinated on his watch. Work dries up as a result, leaving Michael in straitened personal circumstances.

Manchester, the present. The British security services prepare to transfer notorious hired killer Darius Kincaid from prison for an appearance at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, where his former employer, brutal Eastern European dictator Vladislav Dukhovich, is about to go on trial. In return for testifying against Dukhovich, Darius will win freedom for his wife Sonia, who is being held in prison

in Amsterdam. After Dukhovich's special forces attack the convoy en route, officer Amelia Rousset asks ex-boyfriend Michael to get Darius to The Hague. The two men, previously rivals on different sides of the security divide, have a combined skill set that enables them to eliminate a number of Dukhovich's men, who continue their pursuit. Michael must also prevent Darius from absconding. After surviving a sustained chase through the Amsterdam canals, a bond forms between the two men. Michael delivers Darius in the nick of time, only for Dukhovich's men to bomb the court. In the ensuing chaos, Darius kills Dukhovich; Michael is reunited with Amelia after saving her life. Sonia is freed, and Darius escapes to join her in South America.

The House

USA 2017

Director: Andrew Jay Cohen

Certificate 15 88m 1s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

It's a kind of achievement to put together a lot of above-averagely funny people – people who are paid handsomely to be funny – and still manage to turn out a film without a single memorable joke. What we have in lieu here is semi-automated patter, born of improv, where one character will say something unexpected, and the other will say, "That was unexpected." Anyway, *The House* is a mildly nose-laugh-inducing dud, but unlike Will Ferrell's last 'boring suburbanite' movie *Daddy's Home* (2015), it's a dud with unrealised potential.

Scott (Ferrell) and Kate Johansen (Amy Poehler) are the overprotective parents of only child Alex (Ryan Simpkins), who wins a place at university and a scholarship from the local council. When the scholarship is cancelled by the corrupt council leadership, Scott and Kate, with their gambling- and porn-addicted neighbour Frank (Jason Mantzoukas), set up an illegal casino as a get-rich-quick scheme. The casino is a hit with the whole town, but as Scott and Kate become quasi-gangsters, the real gangsters, as well as the police, begin to take an interest.

As in quite a few post-crash comedies, the interest lies in the setting. Some of the comedy is about stereotypically suburban frictions – the casino diversifies into bare-knuckle boxing when the house takes bets on a fight between two punters over leaf-blowing – and, in a nice touch, the casino safe is covered up by a massive Thomas Kinkadee print. But you have to wonder whether this world any longer exists, at least for the generation represented on screen, and in front of it. Scott and Kate are supposedly 40, meaning that they had Alex in their early twenties and were barely 30 in 2008. Scott is the sole earner, doing something unspecified; Kate once had a job but doesn't now. The premise of the film is that they are hopeless with money, so have failed to plan for their one daughter's education (despite being so overprotective), but they have nonetheless ended up with a big house in the suburbs. Frank, meanwhile, lives in a full-blown McMansion. And all their friends and neighbours have enough disposable income to take up gambling when the opportunity arises.

The film's potential is revealed when it is at its most jarring – the boxing draws real blood, leaves real black eyes. And when



Crooked house: Will Ferrell, Amy Poehler



Voyage round my father: Lalit Behl, Adil Hussain

Bhutiani, is only 26 years old. The last Indian feature debut that displayed such a seasoned outlook was *Pather Panchali* (1955), but Satyajit Ray was already 34 when that film was shown at Cannes. Bhutiani first made his mark with the devastating short *Kush* (2013), which dealt with the plight of a Sikh schoolboy in a country torn by sectarian violence in 1984 following the

assassination of prime minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. *Kush* won two awards at Venice; *Hotel Salvation* won the Unesco award at Venice in 2016 and has since won accolades in India and at festivals around the globe. If he continues to build on his early promise, Bhutiani could be one of the few Indian filmmakers who can take a place at the high table of world cinema. 📧

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Sanjay Bhutiani
Sajida Sharma
Shubhashish Bhutiani

Written by

Shubhashish Bhutiani

Dialogues

Asad Hussain

Directors of

Photography

Michael McSweeney
David Huwiler

Editor

Manas Mittal

Production Design

Avyakta Kapur
Music Composer

Tajdar Junaid

Sound Recordist

Atirek Pandey

Costume Design

Shruti Weditwar

Production

Companies

Red Carpet Moving
Pictures and
La Biennale di

Venezia present
La Biennale di Venezia
in support of MiBACT
in collaboration with
Busan International
Film Festival, IFP,
TorinoFilmLab
Busan International
Film Festival, Asian
Cinema Fund
Post-production
Fund in co-operation
with 2L Imageworks,
Wave Lab

Executive Producer

Dina Dattani

Cast

Adil Hussain

Rajiv Kumar

Lalit Behl

Dayanand

Kumar, 'Daya'

Geetanjali Kulkarni

Lata

Palomi Ghosh

Sunita

Navnindra Behl

Vimla

Anil K. Rastogi

Mishraji

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

BFI Distribution

Indian theatrical title

Mukti Bhawan

Running time of
101m 32s includes
short film *Panorama
of Calcutta, India,
from the River
Ganges*. (1899),
approx. 1 minute.

Kanauj, Uttar Pradesh, India, the present. Elderly widower Daya lives with his accountant son Rajiv, daughter-in-law Lata and granddaughter Sunita. One night, Daya dreams that he is going to die; he demands that Rajiv take him to the holy city of Varanasi, where many Indians of the Hindu faith choose to spend their last days in the belief that their souls will attain salvation. Rajiv, who is extremely busy at work, reluctantly takes leave of absence and accompanies his father on the trip. They check into the grimy Hotel Salvation, where manager Mishraji informs them that if Daya doesn't die in 15 days, they'll have to give up

their room to other customers. Accustomed to being a patriarch all his adult life, Daya is extremely demanding, and Rajiv is forced to wait on him hand and foot, while at the same time juggling his equally demanding boss and clients on his mobile phone. Daya becomes friendly with Vimla, a cheery long-term resident of the hotel, who has been circumventing the 15-day rule simply by changing her name in the hotel register every fortnight. Gradually, at Vimla's urging, Rajiv and his father mend their fractious relationship, as Daya mellows and Rajiv loosens up. When Vimla dies suddenly one day, father and son grow closer. Having made peace with his son, Daya dies.