

Wild Target

Screen Daily, 15 June, 2010 | By Mark Adams, chief film critic



Dir: Jonathan Lynn. UK. 2010. 97mins

Despite the fact that it is based on a French film, the crime-comedy *Wild Target* feels very much a British movie in the tradition of the Ealing comedies. The classy casting of Bill Nighy, Emily Blunt and Rupert Grint will certainly help its mainstream appeal and business should be brisk – though unlikely blockbuster – for this frothy and frantic film.

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The film is very much at its best when it is moving at a fair old pace and relying on black comedy for a series of smart laughs. When the momentum slows in the second third it loses its charm and struggles to reignite the plot, but the strength of the performances manages to carry the film through to its jolly - and blessedly dark - climax.

Wild Target also marks a return to the UK for director Jonathan Lynn. He made his name as an actor in UK film and television before writing the acclaimed *Yes Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* comedy series. He directed *Nuns on the Run* in the UK in 1985 before heading to the US where he directed a series of films, including *My Cousin Vinny*, *Sgt Bilko* and *The Whole Nine Yards*.

Victor Maynard (Bill Nighy) is the most respected assassin in the country, but still nagged by his mother (Eileen Atkins) that there is no heir to carry on carrying on the family business. He is commissioned to kill free-spirited thief Rose (Emily Blunt) who has concocted to con a dodgy businessman Ferguson (Rupert Everett) out a vast sum of money in a scheme involving a fake Rembrandt.

Victor is poised to kill her, but as he trails her he is increasingly won over by her sheer joyousness and sense of fun, and when one of Ferguson's men looks to shoot her he steps in and shoots the

man. Suddenly he finds himself caught up in her madcap life as they speed off in her battered red mini to try and escape would-be killers.

Along the way they pick up down-on-his-luck (and a little dim) Tony (Rupert Grint), who Victor thinks could be a possible assassin's apprentice for him. The threesome end up in Victor's country home, where Victor finds himself increasingly drawn to Rose's infectious spirit. Things get problematic when she discovers he is actually a killer...plus his replacement Dixon (Martin Freeman) is also getting closer.

The film works especially well in the early scenes as Victor prepares for his assassinations in the most fastidious of fashions, set alongside Rose's random oddball behaviour and lack of sense of any kind of rules. The London locations are used extremely well – Rose cycling through Trafalgar Square or the Mini racing through the City of London streets – but when they get to the countryside (the film shot partly on location on the Isle of Man) and get stuck in the house the momentum fades and the story lumbers.

Bill Nighy is a master of the quirky look and the oddly delivered line, and he underplays Victor deliciously, acting as a perfect foil for the impressively over-the-top Emily Blunt, who shows that comedy is really her forte. Rupert Grint is nicely mature and engaging as Tony (though at times his character hampers rather than helps the story) while Rupert Everett has a great time as the charmingly brutal businessman.

Production companies: CinemaNX, Isle of Man Productions, Entertainment Film Distributors, Magic Light Pictures, Matador Pictures, Magic Light Pictures.

International sales: Protagonist Pictures, www.protagonistpictures.com, (Cinetic Media handling North America).

Producers: Martin Pope, Michael Rose.

Screenplay: Lucinda Coxon, based on *Cible emouvante (Wild Target)*, written and directed by Pierre Salvadori.

Cinematography: David Johnson.

Production designer: Caroline Greville-Morris.

Editor: Michael Parker.

Music: Michael Price.

Main cast: Bill Nighy, Emily Blunt, Rupert Grint, Rupert Everett, Eileen Atkins, Martin Freeman, Gregor Fisher.