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Cruise Scales Dubai Tower With Magic Gloves; Schlock King: Film

By Rick Warren • Dec 15, 2011

Tom Cruise drives through a sandstorm, scales the world's tallest building, escapes from a submerged car and gets rocked by a Kremlin explosion in "Mission: Impossible -- Ghost Protocol."

And that's just the trailer.

The fourth installment in the blockbuster series is crammed with more death-defying stunts than a Blue Angels air show. All it lacks are three-dimensional characters, a comprehensible plot and a semblance of plausibility.

"Ghost Protocol" is a triumph of style over substance, a film that doesn't pause its frenzied action long enough to let you consider the fact that almost nothing makes sense.

Perhaps that's quibbling over a fantasy-based franchise that dazzles us with gadgetry, exotic locales and doomsday scenarios.

In "Ghost Protocol," super-spy Ethan Hunt (Cruise) tries to prevent a nuclear disaster and clear his name after he's blamed for a terrorist bombing at the Kremlin.

Joining Hunt on the mission are sexy, nail-tough Jane Carter (Paula Patton), nerdy tech guru Benji Dunn (Simon Pegg) and William Brandt (Jeremy Renner), a desk-jockey analyst with a mysterious past.

After Hunt breaks out of a Moscow prison -- it's too complicated to explain why he's there -- he and his crew travel to Dubai and Mumbai in hot pursuit of Cobalt (Michael Nyqvist), a madman bent on starting a nuclear war.

Climbs Tower

They're working without any support from their agency, which has been disavowed by the U.S. president after the Kremlin attack in a move known as Ghost Protocol.

Director Brad Bird, who made the Oscar-winning animated films “Ratatouille” and “The Incredibles,” follows the protocol of all “Mission: Impossible” films with eye-popping action sequences.

The most amazing is Cruise climbing up Dubai’s 2,716-foot Burj Khalifa glass tower from the outside using high-tech magnetic gloves. We also see him leap from a fourth-story ledge onto a moving van, lead a high-speed chase in a blinding sandstorm and brawl with Cobalt over a nuclear-launch briefcase in an automated parking garage where moving cars and platforms pose a serious threat of decapitation.

The film’s publicists say Cruise did his own stunts, including climbing scenes at Burj Khalifa where he wore a harness attached to a cable system and a sequence in which he catapults through an open window.

How do you top that? In the next “MI,” maybe he’ll summit Mount Everest in his bare feet.

“Mission: Impossible -- Ghost Protocol,” from Paramount Pictures, opens today in 300 IMAX theaters across the U.S. It will be released widely on Dec. 21. Rating: **1/2

‘Corman’s World’

What do Jack Nicholson, Robert De Niro, Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Ron Howard, Jonathan Demme and Peter Bogdanovich have in common?

They were all mentored by Roger Corman, the B-movie king who churned out hundreds of low-budget flicks featuring vampires, sharks, aliens, bikers, gangsters and -- almost always -- scantily clad women.

Corman may be best known as a shlockmeister, but he gave early career boosts to a long list of celebrated actors and directors, many of whom pay tribute to him in “Corman’s World: Exploits of a Hollywood Rebel.”

Alex Stapleton’s documentary provides a fascinating look at a filmmaker who defied the studio system and made movies that were consistently profitable despite being dismissed by critics and the movie establishment.

The documentary includes clips from campy classics such as “Monster From the Ocean Floor,” “A Bucket of Blood” and “The Cry Baby Killer.” But it also contains a segment on Corman’s serious 1962 movie, “The Intruder,” which starred William Shatner as a racist who tries to incite violence against black people in a small Southern town.

“Corman’s World: Exploits of a Hollywood Rebel,” from Anchor Bay Films, opens today in New York and Los Angeles. Rating: ***