

Murderers, vigilantes get a 'nasty job done'

NEW YORK (CNS) — If audiences have any sense, they'll save money and wait until "The Last of the Finest" (Orion Pictures) hits their video rental stores.

Notable only for its gutsy casting of character actor Brian Dennehy ("Cocoon") in the lead role and fine Australian actress Deborra-Lee Furness ("Shame") as his wife, this is another far-fetched Los Angeles cop drama about busting big-time drug and money-laundering racketeers and their ties with corrupt politicians. This time out, the high-level crooks trade drugs for arms to Central American rebel fighters.

The film focuses on obsessive undercover veteran cop Frank Daly (Dennehy) and his three young cronies who end up on suspension because they crash and trash one of the baddies' key drug depots without an OK from their corrupt captain (Henry Darrow).

Daly and his pals ultimately take on the bad guys singlehandedly after one of their rank (Bill Paxton) is snuffed out. As ex-cop vigilantes, the trio easily acquires the arms and money to win their fight against the corrupt cops and politicians who easily sidestep U.S. drug and arms policies for greed and their own personal political agendas.

Scottish director John Mackenzie ("The Long Good Friday") makes an inauspicious U.S. debut with this plodding, predictable film that justifies vigilantism as a sign of true patriotism. There's also a bizarre undercurrent that jokingly condones heavy boozing as an acceptable way to solve or escape problems.

"The Last of the Finest" will work best on video as visual wallpaper during post-Super Bowl parties or pre-game warmups.

Due to some profanity laced with sexual vulgarities and bathroom humor and some explosive comic-book violence, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Shock to the System'

Murder seems to be the villainy of choice this season for movie protagonists who have a gripe with their bosses, wives, husbands or co-workers.

This current comedy trend is especially disturbing in "A Shock to the System"



Orion Pictures
Actors Brian Dennehy (right) and Ron Canada in a scene from Orion Pictures' "Last of the Finest." The film focuses on obsessive undercover cop Frank Daly (Dennehy) and his three young cronies who track down high-level crooks trading drugs for weapons with Central American rebel fighters.

(Corsair), a film about a seemingly mild-mannered, middle-aged executive who electrocutes his frivolous wife, blows up his obnoxious yuppie boss and colleague and pushes a street beggar into the path of an oncoming subway train, all in an effort to gain control over his life.

Michael Caine makes the most of his role as Graham Marshall, a Walter Mitty-esque Manhattan ad executive who daydreams that he's a sorcerer with the power to dispatch those who have made his life miserable. When he accidentally pushes

the hostile beggar off the subway platform and easily gets away with it, Graham embarks on a life of murderous comeuppance.

His narcissistic wife, Leslie (Swoosie Kurtz), has become a financial and emotional drain, so he rigs their already overburdened electrical system to permanently zip her lip when her exercise machine continues to blow its fuse daily.

When passed over for the big promotion of his career in favor of blowhard yuppie Robert Benham (Peter Riegert), Graham triggers the gas line on Benham's sailboat

to explode on cue. Another young upstart colleague blows with Benham, so Graham loses two obstacles for the price of one in this murderous caper. With his promotion assured and despite the uneasy sniffing of a dim hometown investigator (Will Patton), Graham is finally in the driver's seat. Or is he?

"A Shock to the System" was adapted by Andrew Klavan from the novel by Simon Brett. For those unfamiliar with the novel, it is unclear what this film is about.

As directed rather flatly by Jan Egleson, the film opens with a likable hero who seems to be set up to draw audience empathy and laughs of recognition. But the film deteriorates into a sick scenario about a man who falls too easily into a pattern of killing those who stand in his way. He is cocky, has no regrets and exploits the kindness of two devoted friends — a young co-worker (Elizabeth McGovern) who falls in love with him and his washed-up previous boss and commuting pal (John McMartin) — to get the nasty job done.

In the end, this film is a lesson in moral corruption that would be utterly distasteful and itself dispensable if not for the fine performance by Caine who has interesting support from McMartin, Riegert, Kurtz and McGovern.

Due to its ambiguous serio-comic theme that seems to condone murder as an acceptable means to an end, some rough language and sexual innuendoes and a jokey on-screen suicide, the U.S.C.C. classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

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