



Bruce Willis in *Lucky Number Slevin*

ABOUT FACE

Lucky Number Slevin

review by M. Faust

Near the beginning of *Lucky Number Slevin*, international assassin Goodkat (Bruce Willis) describes a criminal working method he calls the “Kansas City shuffle.” It works on this simple premise: Everybody looks right, you look left.

That probably works great, as long as you’re done with whatever it is you’re doing before everybody else turns left too. As written by a young man named Jason Smilovic, who was 25 when he first had the idea, *Slevin* is a comic thriller that is a lot less clever than it thinks it is.

It’s a shaggy-dog revenge story made to appear complicated by presenting the early parts of it out of chronological order. This involves a lot of murders lumped together in a gruesome montage that succeeds in confusing us for awhile. But by the time the film decides to explain itself to us, we’re already ahead of it, having figured out the main plot twist and looking back to see if there are any real surprises coming up.

I’ll tell you now: There aren’t. When characters note how much the story reminds them of James Bond or Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest*, you shudder to think that writer Smilovic not only believes this but believes it so strongly that he’s willing to brag about it.

That aside, *Slevin* is still a mixed bag. The comic elements alternate between Tarantinoesquely dark and annoyingly silly. (Far too much of the dialogue sounds like Abbott and Costello routines.) It’s worth seeing primarily for a lot of good actors enjoying themselves with overripe dialogue and unrepentant villany. Chief among these are

Morgan Freeman and Ben Kingsley—sorry, I meant Sir Ben Kingsley—as former friends, now competing Manhattan crime lords who glare at each other from penthouses atop West 12th Street. They get to act one scene together, tied up back to back and only able to see each other’s head, that is fun to watch.

There’s also Stanley Tucci and Danny Aiello; Mykelti Williamson in a brief but enjoyably preposterous bit as a thug who seems to have fake buck teeth and cheeks stuffed with cotton; and Robert Forrester in what looks suspiciously like a role added at the last minute to explain loose ends to the audience.

On the other hand, the film’s star is Josh Hartnett, whose main skill as an actor is projecting a smugness that is highly unbecoming as well as ill-suited to a character who is supposed to be an innocent caught up in a criminal enterprise. (It’s exacerbated by the unfortunate costuming decision to have him spend the first third of the film clad only in a towel wrapped below his hips, just above where his pubic hair would start, presuming that he has any.) The director is Paul McGuigan, who after the raucous Irvine Welsh adaptation *The Acid House* seems to have settled into a career as the poor man’s Guy Ritchie. His touch in the film is less evident that that of the production designer, who apparently owns a wallpaper warehouse filled with rolls left over from 1977.

For what it’s worth, while the film was primarily shot in Montreal, the race track scenes in the early part of the movie were filmed in Fort Erie. av



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