

Movie Review: Central Intelligence

By Joseph McAleer

Catholic News Service

NEW YORK – A high IQ is not a prerequisite for seeing “Central Intelligence” (Warner Bros.). What this dimwitted action comedy demands instead are stamina and perseverance.

Yet another entry in the long roster of buddy films, as directed and co-written by Rawson Marshall Thurber, “Central Intelligence” aims high with a pair of oversized (if physically mismatched) talents, comedian Kevin Hart and wrestler-turned-actor Dwayne Johnson.

Unfortunately, generous servings of violence, crude language and sex jokes leave a bad taste in moviegoers’ mouths, with the result that this odd-couple pairing soon wears out its welcome.

The sliver of a plot revolves around a 20-year class reunion at generic Central High School. Voted “most likely to succeed,” Calvin (Hart), did no such thing. He’s stuck in a mundane accounting job, and his marriage to Maggie (Danielle Nicolet), the sweetheart of his youth, is on the rocks.

Unable to face his classmates, Calvin opts to avoid the party. Until, that is, he receives an unexpected call from Bob (Johnson).

Mercilessly bullied as a student for being an overweight geek – mistreatment that forced him to drop out – Bob has not only grown up, he’s buffed up. He’s now a muscle-bound Adonis and ladies’ man.

“I hope he’s Catholic!” one drooling admirer says. (Later, the church comes in for less benign ribbing with a joke that plays, briefly, on the clergy abuse scandal.)

In high school, Calvin took pity on Bob, and now Bob returns the favor. But the former wimp, it turns out, has more on his mind than friendship.

Bob is a lethal CIA agent on a secret mission to – what else? – save the world. And he needs Calvin’s accounting prowess to unlock stolen encryption codes.

Before you can say, “You’ve got to be kidding,” this distinctly undynamic duo is running for their lives while chasing an elusive enemy known as the “Black Badger.” Amid the mindless silliness, “Central Intelligence” – scripted by Thurber in collaboration with Ike Barinholtz and David Stassen – does impart a strong message about bullying. That might have served adolescent viewers well. But the low tone throughout, as well as the specific elements listed below, strictly preclude endorsement for youngsters.

The film contains action violence and gunplay, rear male nudity, much sexual humor

and innuendo, an anti-Catholic slur and occasional profane and crude language. The Catholic News Service classification is A-III - adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 - parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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