Vantage Point

Talent: Dennis Quaid, Forest Whitaker, William Hurt, Matthew Fox, Said Taghmaoui, Sigourney Weaver, Ayelet Zurer.

Date of review: Thursday 13\textsuperscript{th} March, 2008

Director: Pete Travis
Duration: 90 minutes
Classification: M
We rate it: 2 and a half stars.

Vantage Point, the latest high-tech politically-tinged action flick to hit our screens, begins as a terrifically engaging terrorism thriller, quickly turns into a brilliantly-edited action film, then promptly loses itself in an extended car chase, and, finally, ends in a tie-up-every-loose-end conclusion that’s as pat as a dob of butter. If this sounds like a rather trite way to characterize a film, well, the film itself ends up feeling kind of trite as well.

Dennis Quaid (who has never been a particularly reliable leading actor) stars as Thomas Barnes, an American Secret Service Agent whose sense of well-being and whose ability to effectively carry out his job have both been compromised since he took a bullet in the line of duty some years ago, in order to protect the life of the American President (William Hurt). Barnes has recently been re-instated as one of the Presidential bodyguards, and as the film begins the Secret Service team is looking after the first man as he prepares to deliver an address in a public square in the centre of Barcelona, Spain. Director Pete Travis places the audience in the middle of the action from the get-go, by having us watch the press coverage of the impending speech from the inside of a TV broadcast van, which is being headed up by news director Rex Brooks (Sigourney Weaver in a tense cameo).

The news team has cameras dotted about the square and is covering the event live, and as the President mounts the stage and the speech begins, two gunshots ring out and the first man slams to the ground, seemingly as dead as a dodo. Chaos breaks out across the crowded square, and no sooner does everyone start running in different directions than a bomb explodes, scattering debris everywhere and compounding the horror. The news team can’t quite believe (or keep up with) what’s going on, and soon our bodyguard Barnes rushes into the coverage van and demands to see the footage from the news crew’s different cameras. Barnes is in pursuit of “the shooter” – he thinks he spotted a flash of light coming from a hotel window, and wants to pinpoint the source of the gunshots. He seems to spot something on the tape, and runs out of the van, whereupon another bomb goes off, confusing both characters and
audience. It’s at this point that the film rewinds, placing us back at the beginning of
the story, and telling it over again from an entirely different character’s point of view.

The way in which Vantage Point has been structured is intriguing, to say the least. As
the poster tells us, we’re to see the crucial set of events eight times over, from eight
different characters’ viewpoints: this gives the rewind-and-play-again structure an
impetus that generates a lot of suspense during the film’s first half. The film’s
problems, however, begin as Quaid’s character starts to figure out who has done what,
and who has double-crossed whom, and the moment he commandeers a car and starts
roaring through the streets of Barcelona in pursuit of the badguys, the film jettisons its
interesting prismatic structure and lavishes a great part of its remaining running-time
on an explosive (and rather silly) car-chase, finally resolving things in an oh-so-neat
way that drew faint groans from some of the audience members with whom I saw the
film.

Vantage Point begins very well indeed, whipping its audience up into the action in a
believable way, only to squander much of that good work by spending so little time
retaining any of the intrigue for the conclusion. Fast, furious, and very well produced,
the conclusion of this wannabe edge-of-the-seat thriller is simply too neat by half.

Nick Prescott