Jumper

Talent: Hayden Christensen, Samuel L. Jackson, Jamie Bell, Rachel Bilson, Diane Lane.

Date of review: Thursday 14th February, 2008

Director: Doug Liman
Duration: 88 minutes
Classification: M
We rate it: Two stars.

Jumper continues the worrying Hollywood trend of spending 150 million dollars on a movie and forgetting to buy a decent script. This wannabe-blockbuster, this sci-fi mishmash, wants to thrill us and awe us with its mile-a-minute pace and its cutting-edge special effects, but what it really achieves, after a decent opening, is battering its audience into submission with one scarcely comprehensible action set-piece after another, with almost no character development or suspense to hold it together in any meaningful way at all.

Hayden Christensen stars as David Rice, a young man growing up in your average middle-American town, wanting to attract the attention of the pretty girl in his class at high school, and failing miserably. During an interesting opening scene wherein the class bully taunts David into walking out over the surface of a frozen lake, David crashes through the ice, is trapped underneath and begins to drown, only to find himself (zoom, kapow) suddenly landing on the floor in his school library, covered in water, coughing and spluttering. David, it seems, is a “jumper”, a person gifted with the ability to teleport himself through space at will. He quickly learns to control his ability, and we move forward several years to his early adulthood, where he’s living in a plush apartment in New York and spending his time zapping inside bank vaults to make unauthorised withdrawals in order to fund his breakfast-in-Rome and lunch-at-the-pyramids lifestyle.

Here the villain enters the piece, in the form of Samuel L. Jackson, a man whom we might refer to as an anti-jumper, the representative of a vaguely described religious sect whose stated aim is to wipe the jumpers off the face of the earth. David isn’t the only one who was born with this peculiar ability, you see, and soon an English lad with the same talent (played by the always-wonderful Jamie Bell) is along for the ride, teaming up with David to fight the nasty Sam.
There’s no need to go further into the plot (such as it is); this is a sci-fi chase movie, and, as mentioned above, it becomes so very nearly incomprehensible that further narrative description is completely beside the point. Hayden Christensen (the young Darth Vader from the recent Star Wars prequels) was a decent choice to play the arrogant David, but as a hero he’s not really much to root for, and Sam Jackson, who can be so wonderful, here chews the scenery and almost tries to play it tongue-in-cheek, but amid the CGI and exploding sets it’s not always easy to see what he’s trying to do. Bear in mind, too, that this film is barely 88 minutes long; not only lacking much in the way of script time, it smacks of a hasty recut that has eliminated much-needed character development and exposition; what we’re left with is, as the saying goes, a whole lot of sound and fury with absolutely nothing underneath. A sad way for a studio to spend such an astonishing pile of money, and a great disappointment from the man who directed the amusing indy vehicle Swingers and the first explosive Bourne film. Jumpers, unfortunately, is a film to leap away from.

Nick Prescott