

entertainment

'Bangkok' remake fails to match original

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In the last decade or so, it has become a popular trend in Hollywood to remake Asian films. The results of this trend have been very hit or miss; for every Grudge there is a Godzilla, for every Ring there is a Dark Water, and for every Departed there is a... Bangkok Dangerous.

Bangkok Dangerous is a remake of a 1999 Thai action thriller directed by the Pang Brothers—Danny and Oxide. It followed the story of Kong, a deaf and mute assassin who lives a relatively isolated life in Bangkok with his liaison Aom and his best friend/mentor Joe. Kong's dreary life changes when he meets Fon, an attractive, young pharmacist who shows Kong genuine warmth and kindness (a rarity in his life). Sadly, everything falls apart after a political assassination, which sends Kong's life

spiraling into oblivion.

The new version sees the Pang brothers returning as writer and directors. Nicolas Cage plays Joe, an international assassin who is on his last assignment; a four target contract in Bangkok. Essentially, Cage has two modes as an actor; manic and angst. In this film, he is in full on angst mode; staring hard into the camera every five minutes, speaking in a mumble, and more or less sleep walking his way through the movie. This, in addition to the stupid clothes and the bad hair he sports throughout the movie make this one of Cage's least entertaining performances. Far more appealing is his guide/errand boy

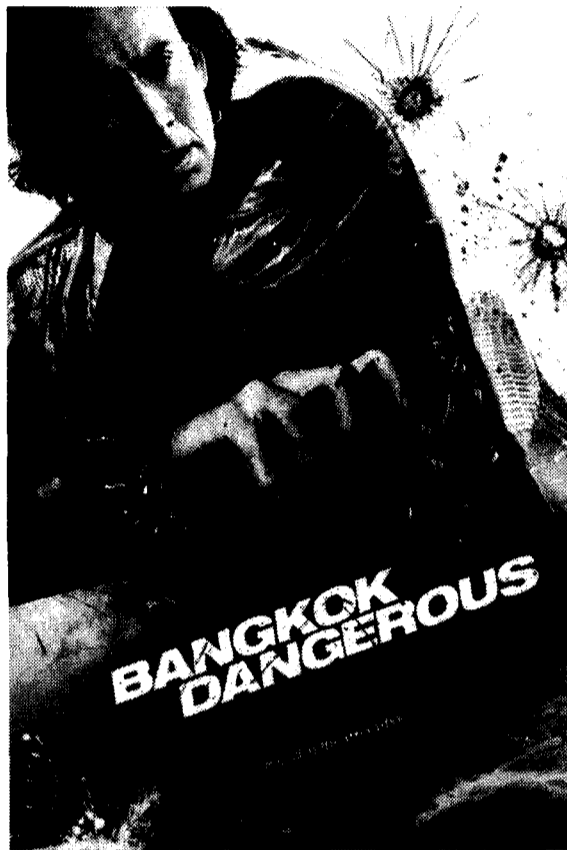


Photo courtesy of newsobserver.com

Kong (no longer deaf) played by Thai actor Shahkrit Yamnarm. Yamnarm gives Kong tons of personality and effortlessly steals scenes from Cage; he has the charisma and screen presence to be a big star internationally. Hopefully this movie will help his career rather than harm (or kill) it.

The 2008 version of Bangkok Dangerous keeps all of the characters but blatantly disregards everything about them except their names. The plot is dramatically different though it ties into the original film from time to time; which results in some of the film's most moronic moments. Joe agrees to be Kong's mentor in the ways of assassination for no

logical reason aside from the fact that it happened in the original. He falls for the pharmacist Fon who is played by the lovely Charlie Young (New Police Story) for the same reason; or maybe he has a thing for women who sell him hydrogen peroxide. Even the film's ending mirrors that of the original, only now it seems more cliché and cheesy than the beautifully tragic original.

As if the idiotic story was not disappointing enough, the action is also a mess. It is, for the most part, dreadfully boring which is the kiss of death to any action film. Even scenes that should be exciting such as Cage chasing down a boat on a motorcycle while being shot at come off as low energy. There are also so many bad action clichés in this film that they begin to overlap each other. If you are looking for a good assassin movie, rent the Killer, Leon: The Professional, or the original Bangkok Dangerous.

Kultgen's new work certainly more than 'Average'

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For those who enjoy wholesome, heartwarming, politically correct, 'Chicken Soup For The Soul', happy ending stories that Oprah Winfrey would gladly give her coveted stamp of approval to, Chad Kultgen's "The Average American Male" stands as a reminder that not all writers care what you think. Not only does Kultgen not care what you think, he wants to make you cry delicious tears of disgust and disapproval. The requirement of a sense of humor guarantees that fans of Danielle Steele, Nicholas Sparks and Nora Roberts will never get past the first page. If Alaskan libraries stocked it on their shelves, a Sarah Palin led think-tank of hockey moms and Christian moose hunters would surely have attempted to ban it. Just the mere possibility that Kultgen's story offends well-mannered, socially conscious,

family-friendly, morally superior crusaders makes the time spent reading oh so fulfilling.

"The Average American Male" gives the reader a raw, unapologetic and completely hilarious look into the male mind. It chronicles the everyday thoughts, relationships, personal habits and videogame achievements of a male twenty-something who remains nameless throughout the story. While not an entirely original literary device, the nameless aspect makes the main character shamefully relatable. It's shameful because the unlabeled hero has the libido of a hormone-crazed chimpanzee, the gritty sexism of Charles Bukowski

and the relationship skills of Conan the Barbarian. But in a suppressed inner thoughts sort of way, the reader will have no trouble understanding and

recognizing his point of view.

Often times reading like a stream of consciousness, "The Average American Male" immediately establishes the tone with its opening chapter titled 'Christmas with Mom and Dad.' Kultgen writes a three-word sentence, "Same old bullshit," before moving on to chapter two. The plot quickly unfolds from there.

While living and working in Los Angeles, the nameless hero balances his desire for a woman he spots at the airport that he may or may not ever meet again against the convenience of his long-time, aspiring actress girlfriend who, he fears, may end up just like her nagging mother. He eventually ends up with the airport siren but not before worming his way out of an engagement with his girlfriend that he unknowingly agreed to after a long evening of not listening to her.

When the main character is not caught up in the drama of the main plot, he plays video games and has surreal encounters with random females. The best laugh-out-

loud moment in the book comes about 45 pages in when Kultgen sandwiches two chapters about a woman the main character finds irresistible because of her sexy hair-lip around a chapter devoted to the hero's epic discovery of a rare 'Super Nintendo' game in the rummage bin at 'Electronics Boutique.'

Without giving too much of the ending away, rest assured that there is no happy endings in "The Average American Male." The hero does not exactly fulfill his and perhaps the reader's dream of never relinquishing the desire to remain immature. In most stories, the transition from boy to man or girl to woman satisfies the reader, but not here.

The easy thing to do is dismiss the book as being an exercise in modern misogyny but that's why it's the easy thing to do. Take a closer look. The satire is not difficult to see. Even old Johnny Swift and his plan to cure the Irish Potato Famine with sautéed poor children would be proud.

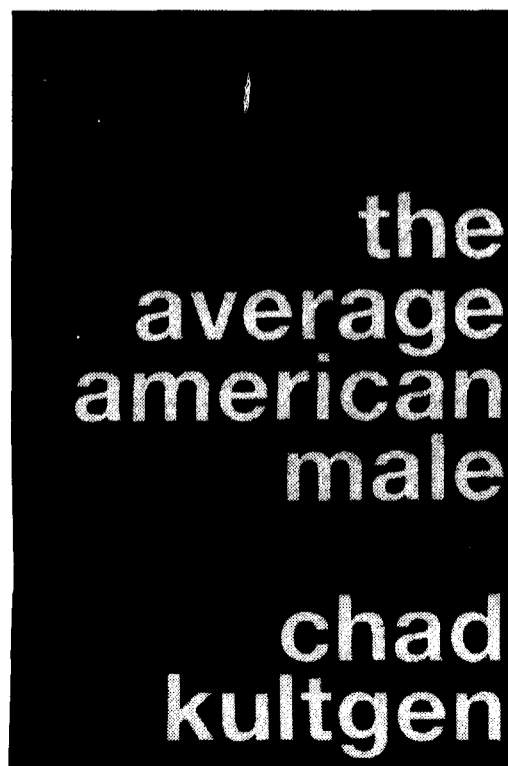


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