



BIFF '09: The Last Lullaby

By J.B.

J.B. spins

June 09, 2009

When a retired hitman suffers from insomnia, is it due to boredom or a guilty conscience? Perhaps a little of both for "Price," the mysterious former assassin created by Max Allan Collins, the prolific writer of crime fiction, including the Road to Perdition graphic novels on which the Tom Hanks film was based. Now Price (a.k.a. Quarry in Collins's books) has also made the jump to the big screen in Jeffrey Goodman's *The Last Lullaby*, which recently screened during the Brooklyn International Film Festival.

Price could use a good night's sleep, but he will settle for a nice payday. During his regular nocturnal ramblings, he happens across a kidnapping underway. After making short work of the original lowlife abductors, Price makes the exchange himself. Easy money, or so it seemed at the time.

Sometime later, the father of the kidnapped woman tracks down Price to lure him out of retirement. Again, it sounds like easy money: one million dollars to kill a librarian. However, it has to look like an accident and happen within the next ten days, neither of which should be a problem for a man with Price's skills. Yet, there is something about the marked Sarah that gets to the contract killer. So when her stalker ex-boyfriend starts getting physical, Price puts a stop to it—permanently.

It turns out the two have something in common as kindred insomniacs. As an unlikely relationship blossoms between the two, the hunter becomes the protector, setting up an inevitable conflict with Price's employer. While there are certainly scenes of Price going about his old profession with ruthless efficiency, *Lullaby* is not an action film per se. It is more in the tradition of moody film noirs, spending more time on character development than gunfire and car chases.

In a case of perfect casting, Tom Sizemore plays the hardened criminal in need of redemption. Regardless of his notorious off-screen life, the character actor has the right brooding screen presence to carry the film as its flawed anti-hero. *Lullaby* also boasts an intriguing supporting cast, including the believably down-to-earth Sasha Alexander (formerly of *Navy N.C.I.S.*), who brings out both the vulnerability and resilience of Sarah. 24 viewers will also note the presence of Sprague Grayden (or First Daughter Olivia Taylor), again playing a spoiled daughter of privilege, in a small but memorable part.



Although *Lullaby* clearly addresses themes of conscience and redemption, Goodman wisely never overplays those emotional cards. The surprisingly subtle script co-written by Collins and Peter Biegen mercifully spares viewers any trite scenes of tearful confessions. More than anything, the characters are simply tired, in every sense.

Lullaby might be too quiet and discrete for genre fans, but not edgy enough for the hipster art-house scene. Still, it ought to find an in-between audience as a thoughtful, well-conceived little crime film. Following its East Coast premiere at BIFF, *Lullaby* opens this Friday (6/12) in San Jose, as part of its targeted release strategy, while the festival continues through this Sunday (6/14).

©2009 J.B. spins

<http://jbspins.blogspot.com/2009/06/biff-09-last-lullaby.html>

<http://www.brooklynfilmfestival.org>