Eastern Promises (2007)

Dir: David Cronenberg

4.5/5

An Arthouse mystery accomplished with criminal history and flourished by Russian culture, language and identity. The movie is themed on Russian mafia, agency and culture set in England. It’s about manipulation of identity in collectivism and illusion of destiny.

I haven’t seen any movie of David Cronenberg before; he is so effective in blending art with style, violence and diverse values inherited by people within.

The art-decoration was magnificent, the cinematography was splendid. The best thing I think was Viggo Mortensen’s acting - he’s damn stylish, looks so Russian and perfectly delivers the accent - he’s so calm and is fascinating to see how he handles any situation with patience and guts, I totally love the character comparatively to Ryan Gosling from Drive - one of the very intimidating fictional person I find idolatry. Vincent Cassel was also great especially every time he’s drunk and not to forget Naomi Watts and Armin Mueller-Stahl.

Now, David Cronenberg has fascination with bodies - the movie starts with three bodies - i) the throat slitting of a gangster ii) the expiring body of a pregnant prostitute and iii) the body of her infant born soaked in blood; It’s an embodiment for collective violence of which bodies are perpetrators as well as victims. We then find out that all these have a connection to a Russian Mafia called ‘Vor v Zakone’ (i.e. a Thief in law) who follow a certain code and tradition in their business; it’s one division is run by Semyon (Armin), his son is Kirill (Vincent) who hires a Driver-Bodyguard Nikolai (Viggo) and Anna (part Russian - part English played by Naomi) is a mid-wife in a hospital who saves the prostitute’s child in hospital, now she sets in the pursuit to find the father of this child as she uncovers a diary with the prostitute having potentially damaging evidence against the mafia.

Bodies and Tattoos are the motifs here. It is told that in Russian prisons, every prisoners have to wear tattoos on their bodies - which describes their tales - of all the crimes they’ve committed or else they aren’t trusted at all; we also see the ‘Vor v Zakone’ stars right upon the hearts on each member of the family, In one scene police catches a dead body from the one in family - but it’s already professionally processed to eliminate it’s individual identity and leaving it with collective identity of his tattoos.

More elaboration from David Cronenberg, Viggo Mortensen and screenwriter Steven Knight.

The plot explains the title which is narrated by a prostitute that - she was intimidated to migrate to England as she would earn the sum by singing for few hours in a hotel in just couple of weeks what she used to earn in months at Russia - thus this fake ‘Eastern Promises’ have completely ruined her life.

The ethnicity of Russia is described flawlessly, we see the hotel of Semyon - a centre of mafia, shimmering with beautiful dinner parties and music - we also see Anna trying to re-join her Russian heritage before she comes to know the criminal phase of Semyon.

Genres: Crime, Mystery, Thriller