Fresh off his Oscar nomination for his role in "The Departed", Marky Mark Wahlberg is suddenly one of the more sought after actors in Hollywood after a non-descript beginning to his acting career. In "Shooter", Wahlberg plays a Marine sniper who has become a recluse after a botched

The action/adventure genre has been woefully missing from theater screens so far in 2007. Sure, there was the absurd “Smokin’ Aces” and the boring “Alpha Dog”, but both of these movies were trying too hard to be something else as well (edgy comedy, social drama), and accordingly, both stunk like room temperatured liver pudding wrapped in athletic socks that haven’t been washed in a month.

“300” broke the dry spell that had existed since the last good action/adventure film, “Casino Royale”, and now we have a second decent addition to the testosterone stable, the Mark Wahlberg vehicle “Shooter”, a fast paced semi-clever thriller that may not be exceptional in any way, but is still highly watchable.

SPOILER’S ALERT AND DEFINITION! I always try to avoid posting any spoilers in my reviews...and I will never publish details about any unexpected plot twists or unforeseen occurrences in the movies. But in order to talk about the movie in general, I will often reveal information about the characters and plot that will clearly be known to anyone that has watched the trailers of the movie. In the case of “Shooter”, that revelation is about the initial betrayal of Swagger, which we’re plainly shown on the trailers played on television. If you haven’t seen

the trailers, and you wish to know nothing about the movie beforehand, you might want to skip the review until after you've seen the film.

Wahlberg plays Bobby Lee Swagger, a Marine sniper who has become a recluse after a botched "black ops" mission that claimed his best friend. His life is the stuff of dreams for most men; solitude up in the mountains with amazing vistas at every angle, sufficient money to ignore the rest of the world, and a dog that will open up your refrigerator and bring you a beer (I started trying to train my Belgian Sheepdog that trick right after I got home, but my plans were quickly 86'd by my wife).

So Swagger is not exactly receptive to seeing the proverbial government issued big assed black SUV pulling up his road. Out steps Danny Glover, who by contract must play either highly ethical family men, or diabolically evil manipulators. As there are no kids or wife stepping out with him, only a couple of creepy associates, take a guess what he is this time. He tells Swagger that he is Col. Johnson (no branch of service mentioned), and that he needs Swagger's help. A transmission was intercepted stating that a sniper will try to assassinate the President within the next week. Johnson's people have determined that it would probably have to happen in one of three places, and would have to be done by a sniper shooting from over 1,500 yards away. Johnson wants Swagger to stake out the three areas, and determine the best way "someone" would do it, so that they can take measures to prevent it.

After some major button pushing by Johnson aimed at Swagger's patriotism, Swagger is on his way to D.C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia for his recon missions. He determines that it must happen in Philadelphia, and he sets up shop with Johnson and his group to try to save the President. Which is, of course, an elaborate setup, as Swagger was supposed to be killed after the assassination and all the blame placed on him.

But everyone knows that action/adventure heroes are hard to kill. Swagger naturally escapes, despite being shot twice, and the rest of the movie concerns his attempts to avoid capture/death, while also being pissed off enough that he'll risk it all to find out the details of the conspiracy and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Unlike Harrison Ford in "The Fugitive", he can't do it alone, and enlists the aid of his former partner's widow Sarah (Kate Mara, as gorgeous as ever) and later drags in the rookie FBI agent (Michael Pena) he encountered after he was wounded. The agent, Nick Memphis, is ostracized for failing to capture Swagger when

he had the chance, and is further ridiculed by revealing that when Swagger handcuffed him, he told him that he was innocent and being set up. Memphis's insistence in keeping the investigation open is what leads to his next encounter with Swagger.

Needless to say, there are numerous scenes of narrow escapes, sinister back-room government deals, and gory righteous vengeance. Most of it is right out of the "Action/Adventure Playbook", and relatively easy to predict. What makes it rise above the rest is taut direction from Antoine Fuqua and some excellent acting from Mara, Pena, and Wahlberg. Fuqua has exhibited an extraordinary talent in getting much more out of his films than the thin scripts should allow, making highly entertaining films out of "Training Day", "The Replacement Killers", and "King Arthur", none of which had a screenplay that would make Orson Wells envious. But while he had extremely charismatic lead actors/characters in the form of Denzel Washington in "Training Day" and Clive Owen in "King Arthur", here he and Wahlberg do the opposite. Swagger does NOT swagger. He is the laconic, quietly dangerous type of individual that used to be played so well in these types of movies by Clint Eastwood or Charles Bronson.

Ultimately the movie stalls out somewhat and it gets to a point where it's not really sure where to go...so let's just blow up some more stuff. Which is a shame, as the conspiracy parts are well conceived, and up until the end the escapes and resolutions are logically acceptable (if not logical in regards to one man outrunning hundreds of bullets). The end is not a disappointment in regards to the tone of the movie...it's just that it seemed to run out of gas on the last turn and coasted across the finish line.

But a win is a win, and given the dearth of choices in 'shoot-em-up' movies this year, "Shooter" fills the need.

My Rating: Bill Nelsen (2 ½ footballs). OK. Worth seeing at the theatre at matinee prices.