

# ‘Mile 22’ is a riddling ride through too many alleyways



CHENNAI: “Mile 22” may sound like a strange title, but it is within this distance from an airfield to the American Embassy in Indocarr (a fictionalized version of perhaps South Korea) where most of the action unfolds.

A mystery agent, Li Noor (Iko Uwais), walks into the embassy with an asylum request. In return, he volunteers to hand over a code to decipher the location of shipments of cesium, a chemical capable of mass destruction. The code is inside a disc, which will deconstruct in eight hours.

James Silva (Mark Wahlberg) and his team of American commandos in charge of anti-terror operations are asked to escort Noor from the embassy to an airfield 22 miles away, where a waiting plane will take him away.

It is never clear why Noor turns himself in, and the film, which marks the fourth time that director Peter Berg and Wahlberg are collaborating, is equally perplexing at other places.

While their earlier film, “Patriots Day,” marked a high point (with “Lone Survivor” and “Deepwater Horizon” flying at various levels), “Mile 22” seems to have hit the bottom. The two have announced that it is the first of a trilogy, and it seems like a desperate attempt to start a franchise.

Much of the movie’s confusion comes down to its innumerable subplots. Silva is bitter most of the time, abusive, violent and driven to lecturing people to an extent that it drives them mad. Sometimes, he comes off as a habitual killer. Supposedly bipolar, orphaned at 11, married and divorced three times, he is bizarre. But he is also strangely entertaining.

The other bit of fun, although bloody, comes from Uwais’ martial arts hand-to-hand combat at the embassy’s detention center, while the painful divorce of team member Alice Kerr (Lauren Cohan) and her separation from her little daughter offer tearjerking moments. Much of all these could have been excised, save for Uwais’ bare-fisted fight, which is the movie’s high point.

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