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The most common complaint about crime dramas made by aspiring filmmakers is that violence too often is used to advance a story, instead of incorporating the violence into a balanced narrative. The opposite is true of Brian Jun's "Joint Body," in which the potential for violence percolates under the surface of the story, but is only allowed to cut loose once. Everything else is there, including an attractive cast, a decent foundation for explosive action and borderline sleazy locations. The missing ingredient is the one most crucial to the story. Veteran hard guy Mark Pellegrino is in prison, about to be released on parole, when his wife tells him she wants nothing to do with him. That stings, but what's more hurtful is the condition of his release that requires him to refrain from contacting his teenage daughter. Nick's parole officer sternly warns him against breaking the terms of his release, and he seems intent on staying free. He moves into a cut-rate apartment building, where the first people he meets are a red-headed stripper (Alicia Witt) and an elderly woman being wheeled out of the residence on a gurney. Upon making contact with his estranged brother, Nick is surprised to learn that he's married and a newly minted cop. In a decision that begs credulity, the cop gives his brother an untraceable handgun "for protection" – a direct violation of his parole – and suggests they maintain some distance between each other. The gun will come into play soon thereafter, bringing Nick and the stripper together as desperadoes. If that scenario portends anything, it's that the second half of "Joint Body" should be explosive. Instead, none of threads lead anywhere, except to a tepid resolution. Witt and Pellegrino are quite good, given the limitations of the script, so it would have been nice if they were given more to do.

- Gary Dretzka

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