

HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS:

Sequels...

Sometimes they work and more often than not, they don't.

But I found this Harry Potter entry, the sequel to "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" to be more mature, riskier and still downright delightful and fun.

Director Chris Columbus, who also directed the first film, has indeed been rightfully chosen to be the leader in interpreting the fabled books into movie lore. He understands the spirit, the power and impact of the books as written by author J. K. Rowling admirably. While this is a darker, and yes, gloomier movie, the tone is important in reveling in the power of magic, friendship and more basically, the power of good vs. evil while introducing some interesting and quite fascinating characters.

While Harry (Daniel Radcliffe) reunites with his friends Ron (Rupert Grint) and Hermione (Emma Watson), the movie is less a sequel than an exploration and a darker and different discovery into the secrets of Hogwarts School (a school for magicians). Beginning (as in the first installment) with a rather dreary and mundane exploration into his adopted family, the movie quickly moves into the world where Harry belongs and fits into-a world of magic.

It introduces two new characters Gilderoy Lockhart a mischievous and not so powerful magician played wonderfully by Kenneth Branagh and Lucius Malfoy (Jason Isaacs), the father of Draco who has a conniving and malicious presence throughout. He slithers in his role. Who better to represent the "Slytherin" faction?

The premise of the story is about a ghost Tom Marvolo Riddle, and his diary with blank pages. The chamber of secrets has once again been opened and unleashes the events to come. Riddle has a scheme to come back to life and the movie is ultimately about Harry's ability to stop this nefarious course of events.

The production design by Stuart Craig is unrestrained, awe-inspiring and matches his work in the first movie. The adapted screenplay is by Steve Kloves. This is a world that magically feels right. Harry becomes the focal point in this movie and Hermione takes more of a back seat here which is a bit of a disappointment because she was simply charming in the first movie. The rest of the cast is wonderful including the grandfatherly figure Richard Harris as Prof. Albus Dumbledore, Alan Rickman as the shifty Prof. Snape and the irrepressible Maggie Smith as Prof. McGonagal.

The movie is filled with one action fantasy sequence after another. It is a pleasant diversion but one has to wonder how younger children will respond. A sequence with spiders is disturbing and perhaps traumatic (I hope you don't have arachnophobia). And the final climatic sequence is absolutely harrowing.

As escapist fare goes, this movie is fun for both kids and adults. The screenplay is filled with wit, humor, adventure and heart. It might not have the mythological qualities of the original, but it is a worthy successor. It will leave your cynicism at the door as it transports you into a marvelous and enchanting world filled with endless wonder and possibility.

161 Minutes

MPAA Rating: PG (for some scary moments, some creature violence and mild language)

RATING: B+

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