

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE:

Combining magic, wizardry, elements of courage and friendship, director Chris Columbus has created an indelible fantasy film for the ages. Though not entirely original (it borrows from "Star Wars", the works of Ray Harryhausen, the works of George Pal amongst others), it still shines for this generation.

Based on a novel by J. K. Rowling, director Columbus best known for his "Home Alone" franchise, has made his best film to date. And the cinematography by veteran John Seale and adapted screenplay by Steve Kloves ("Wonder Boys") help immeasurably. The music is by reliable John Williams.

Daniel Radcliffe plays Harry Potter a reluctant wizard to be. He becomes fast friends with two other would be wizards Ron played by Rupert Grint and Hermione played stylishly by a young Emma Watson. All three have a nice repartee on screen and Hermione is genuinely captivating. Tom Felton devilishly plays Draco, a dracula like figure, who's Potter's young nemesis.

The use of British actors and the feel of the castle surroundings (in Medieval like England) where the action takes place just adds wonderfully to the ambiance in the movie. Adult supporting players include Richard Harris as Albus Dumbledore (with a Merlin like feel), Maggie Smith as the head of the school, Alan Rickman as a mysterious professor of "potions", John Cleese, Julie Walters and Robbie Coltrane as a lovable bumbling giant named Hagrid. All combine to work in unison to create a memorable movie.

This movie could have been lost in its special effects, but instead the special effects move the movie along as though it were part of the screenplay. One honestly looks forward to the next sequence.

In a nutshell, the movie is about a "sorcerer's stone" which will allow one to live forever. But the "dark forces" want the stone for their own cause although we never sense what harm it will cause even if they obtain it. Harry, a burgeoning wizard, wants to find and keep it away from them. But essentially, the movie's message is that living one's life is more important than immortality and that courage, bravery and friendship (love) matters the most.

This is, after all, a fantasy film and no earth shattering exposes or complex themes.

There are some truly mesmerizing sequences such as the game on broomsticks which resembles a cross between roller derby, hockey and pinball. The birth of the dragon reminds one of Harryhausen's finest fantasy movies of Sinbad. The three-headed creature is also a joy to watch as are the "moving stairs".

Some sequences such as the broomstick game, the troll encounter, and the chess match are somewhat harrowing and might be too intense and violent for younger kids, but overall Columbus has done an admirable job in his pacing of the story.

Most characters are simply developed and are rather stereotypical types and the goings on sometimes leaves one in the dark. And, in fact, the phenomenon of the "Harry Potter" books and movie runs at breathtaking pace along the freeway to what Seattle film critic William Arnold calls "the juvenilization of culture". Nonetheless, it is a guilty pleasure.

But the movie has a mythological quality which I think will allow it to stand the test of time, and the acting, special effects, script, and general nice feel to the proceedings all add up to a winner.

152 Minutes

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

RATING: A-

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