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—Movie Reviews—

Golden Compass introduces a world of possibilities



NATALIE BUDESA AT THE MOVIES

Flaunting the hit “Lord of the Rings,” New Line hopes the fantasy genre has a new blockbuster in the form of “The Golden Compass,” an adaptation of the book by Philip Pullman. The first part of the trilogy definitely has lasting power, as its new world challenges both our imagination and beliefs.

Lyra Belacqua is a refreshing protagonist who defies authority and will only show respect to those who earn it. In her world, people exist with the accompaniment of a daemon, or a manifestation of their soul in the form of an animal. Lyra’s daemon, Pan, serves as her furry conscience and scampering playmate, voiced by Freddie

Highmore.

And it would feel good not to be alone when Lyra is faced with the clandestine workings of the Magisterium with her uncle working against them. There is a frightful connection between the Magisterium and the Gobblers, who have been kidnapping children for experimental reasons. Lyra’s uncle (Daniel Craig) pushes her away as she discovers the interesting topic of Dust, a mysterious existence that seems to scare the Magisterium. But Lyra finds adventure in the form of the wicked Ms. Coulter (Nicole Kidman) and the truth-telling golden compass.

Aside from some dragging pacing, Compass manages to keep the wonders of its story enough to satisfy. Ian McKellen as Iorek, an armored ice bear, is purely astounding, and paired with Dakota Blue Richards (Lyra), makes a heroic team you want to enter the nastiest battles and come out as victors.

Anyone who has read the book should be able to see the underlying themes in the story. Pullman’s works question religion and authority, where even a



DAKOTA BLUE RICHARDS plays Lyra with Sam Elliot as Lee Scorsby in “The Golden Compass.”

fantastical idea such as Dust has startling and interesting meaning. However, from a less in-depth point of view, Lyra’s fight is merely one against faceless authority that endangers her friends. Too many of the changes favored the comfort of the audience and, in turn, shying away from controversial issues means more revenue.

My final word that I hope director Chris Weitz and audiences learn to appreciate is the importance of the existence of different viewpoints. People cannot be scared of differing

takes on life, but should be trusted to confront them, and whether it shakes their comfort or reaffirms their beliefs is a testament to each person’s own strengths. Give entertainment the chance at intellect, minds the right to explore, and words the power they deserve. There’s a whole world out there, and in Lyra’s case, multiple ones.

Natalie Budeska is 17 years old and is a senior at CV/HS. She plans to be a screenwriter and author. Send your comments to movies@claytonpioneer.com

“August Rush” simply makes me sad



JEANNA ROSS AT THE MOVIES

This movie had it all. A beautiful cast of wonderful performers, a gorgeous score by Hans Zimmer, and a sweet story arch. The trailer alone made this critic cry. When Century Theatres announced they would be airing a preview a week before the wide release, a sold-out crowd of people encircled the outside of the theater in downtown Walnut Creek on a Saturday night.

And all for naught. “August Rush” is a wretched film. I feel cheated for having paid full price and guilty for having subjected my husband to such trite contrivances.

The basic story is fine. Two musicians conceive a child; their child is also musical. All three feel music in their bones; if they can unite, it will be around their musical sensibilities.

Then the hideous part rears

its ugly head. “August Rush” plays like a 2000-page novel ripped down to a two-hour film. No character is truly developed. Relationships are developed and ripped apart before the audience has a chance to decide how they feel about anything. The dialogue is both inane and completely predictable; I was scoffing ten

minutes into the film as the two young lovers (unsarcastically) created such gems as “What are you looking at?” “You.”

Even the most lovely actors are left with little to no sub-



Jamia Simone Nash and Freddie Highmore star in Warner Bros. “August Rush”.

stantial dialogue. Freddie Highmore, a favorite since he broke my heart in “Finding Neverland” is restricted to the same mantra from page one. He walks about in a peaceful daze from one bizarre situation to the next, even earning laughs from the audience for his lack of reaction.

Wow. Stellar writing. That’s why they’re paid the big bucks, I guess.

And it only gets worse. Storylines appear and disappear at will. Characters walk into one

scene and appear in another with absolutely no apparent transition. We’re left to our own discernment to decide how characters live or what drives them. The storyline I’ve had to create in my head is marvelous – too bad it wasn’t on the screen.

Robin Williams – yet again – has chosen poorly in his role of the Wizard, a Fagin-like musician who takes in the musically inclined runaways who cross his path. Part agent, part musical pimp, he never takes shape, even in his final moments onscreen.

The music is the only saving grace to “August Rush.” Freddie Highmore’s title character is a musical prodigy who feels the music in all things, from the beat of a basketball to the wind in the trees. The simplest walk across the street becomes a “Stomp”-like percussive anthem to the beauty inherent in the world we inhabit.

But it’s not worth it. Buy the soundtrack or rent it on DVD, but do not attend this film.

Jeanna Ross is an English teacher at Clayton Valley High School and a free lance writer. She regularly contributes to the Pioneer. Send comments to her at movies@claytonpioneer.com.

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