

Movie Review: 'The Golden Compass'

by David_Elliott

There may be box-office gold from "The Golden Compass," but panning for it while viewing is a real day at the mine.

It stars beautifully named Dakota Blue Richards as beautifully named Lyra Belacqua, niece (maybe more) to lofty Lord Asriel, one of the big men at Oxford U. Daniel Craig plays him, but is seldom seen. Fantabulous forces infiltrate this world and a parallel universe.

'THE GOLDEN COMPASS' - Mrs. Coulter (Nicole Kidman) has a possibly golden bit of advice for young Lyra (Dakota Blue Richards) in the fantasy 'The Golden Compass.' CNS Photo courtesy of Laurie Sparham. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Lyra, like almost everyone, has her "daemon," a cute companion pet that can speak and even morph into other species (like ferret to bird). A menacing power has abducted kids to a polar lab where

they are separated from their daemons, a borderline Nazi operation that Lyra will invade with various stalwart companions.

The most mysterious is Miss Coulter, played by Nicole Kidman. She's icy when not vaguely maternal, and wears outfits worthy of the Golden Compass Globes.

Lyra even gets a compass, an "alethiometer" (aletheia is the old Greek word for truth) that allows her to spot who's naughty or nice. She forges northward, underdressed but eager. She doesn't tout her Oxford background.

In a big plot jolt, her huge, favorite polar bear (roaring as Ian McKellen) battles the royal bear, and then there's a sort of Ice Capades massacre outside the evil laboratory.

Chris Weitz directed by the Big Golden Book, tapping the "His Dark Materials" fantasy novels of Philip Pullman. Weitz World is very white, big on digital scene painting, like a grandiose folding of Pullman into Jules Verne, Nordic myths, Jack London, "Ice Station Zebra" and New Line Cinema's fierce wish for another "Lord of the Rings" bonanza.

There is, like dust, a floating sense of the spiritual. But the dark materials loom vaguely. Will kids care? The movie rumbles with adult verbiage and has a Tolkien-ized pressure of importance, yet it plays as a very simple adventure about a gutsy tomboy who hates the idea of becoming a lady but looks with awe at Kidman (well, don't we all).

There is a clanging rivalry of serious British accents. Craig, McKellen, Ian McShane, Derek Jacobi, Kristin Scott Thomas, Christopher Lee, Tom Courtenay all chime in for their checks, only to be deftly checkmated by the burly Western twang of Sam Elliott as grizzled flyboy Lee Scoresby.

Elliott's daemon is a Texas jack rabbit with fabulous ears. In fact, the daemons dominate many scenes. This is a serial saga - the ending almost screams "to be continued!" - that maybe could do best as merchandising in pet stores.

A New Line Cinema release. Director, writer: Chris Weitz. Cast: Dakota Blue Richards, Nicole Kidman, Eva Green, Daniel Craig, Jim Carter, Sam Elliott, Ben Walker. Running time: 1 hour, 53 minutes. Rated PG-13. 2 stars.

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