Film Close-Up: Nicole Kidman

by Joey_Berlin

Despite her status as one of Hollywood's highest-paid and most-sought-after actresses, Nicole Kidman never had the lead role in a movie that made more than $100 million at the U.S. box office. She is certainly comfortable with that.

NICOLE KIDMAN - Nicole Kidman plays icy-hearted villainess Mrs. Coulter in the fantasy movie 'The Golden Compass.' CNS Photo courtesy of Lauri Sparham. But all the same, Kidman sure could stand to star in a hit, and "The Golden Compass" could be it. A special effects-powered fantasy set in an alternative world resembling England, "The Golden Compass" is adapted from the popular Philip Pullman novels. The story follows young Lyra Belacqua, portrayed by newcomer Dakota Blue Richards, on an epic journey. Kidman plays a glamorously stylish but icy-hearted villainess named Mrs. Coulter. A unique aspect of the film is that every human character is accompanied by an animal alter ego called a daemon, which reflects their personality and expresses their inner thoughts.

Offscreen, Kidman is married to country music star and fellow Australian Keith Urban. She also shares custody of the two children adopted during her decade-long marriage to Tom Cruise. On the film front, Kidman has "Margot at the Wedding" in theaters and she is currently filming an epic World War II movie called "Australia" with her "Moulin Rouge" director, Baz Luhrmann.

Q: Are you a big fan of the fantasy genre? Do you have some favorite books or movies that you share with your own kids?

A: I'm not a huge fan of fantasy. In terms of filmmaking, I've been drawn to more psychological dramas. But I think what drew me to "The Golden Compass" was it had the intricacies of the characters to allow strong performances. In terms of fairy tales, I grew up with a lot of literature because my mother always would read to me.

Q: Is it true that you turned down this role at first? What was your hesitation?

A: I actually just didn't want to work when I originally was offered the part. I was at a place in my life where I was in Tennessee and I was just feeling a little lazy and wanting to hang out. And then Chris actually sent me a letter and Philip Pullman sent me a letter and with those two letters I was seduced. I'm really glad that I was.

Q: How nice is it to see a strong-willed young girl at the center of "The Golden Compass?" Do you think the film will appeal to boys?

A: I hope so. I hope it appeals to both. My son is really interested in seeing the film, too. But it's lovely that the protagonist is a young girl. There are not many films where it is. And I also like the way that Lyra is depicted; she's got a wonderful sense of her will and she's a free spirit and she's serious. I think that's a lovely combination to have onscreen for young girls to see.

Q: Before the film even came out, some people were judging it to have an anti-Christian tone. Did you have any concerns about the religious references?

A: I think there's almost an alarmist approach to it right now and when you see the film, that will be dissipated. That's simply put. I don't want to make a film that's anti-religious or anti-Catholic. I come from a Catholic family so that's not something that my grandmother would be very happy about, and I don't really think that's what I'm involved in.

Q: Had you worked much with a green screen and special effects before this? Is that a type of acting you can enjoy?

A: I've actually never done it to this degree. I've said that at drama school, the mime class was the class that I thought, "Well, I'm not going to be showing up for that." And I would wag that class a lot. I would also wag

accent class. And they're the two things that I've used most in my career, accents and now mime work. So I say to all actors out there: Go to your mime classes because it's the future.

Q: You are already at the pinnacle of your profession. What drives you to still work as hard as you do?

A: I think when you get employed to do a job, even though to me this is more fun than a job, you have to give everything and do the best you can do. So in terms of working hard, I'm still in the middle of doing a film in Australia which I've been doing for nine months now, and that's too hard. It's a long time and I'm looking forward to next year and just having a break. But at the same time I'm so privileged, particularly because I'm 40 years old and I'm playing some of the greatest roles I've had the opportunity to play in the last couple of years.

Q: What would your own daemon be?

A: Well, it changes. Yesterday it was a kitten because I love milk and I like to be petted and taken care of and sleep a lot. But today, it's changed. Today it's a tiger.

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