The Screen Savor: Designing Women 'The Devil Wears Prada'

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "The Devil Wears Prada"

"All right, everybody, gird your loins!" The employees of Runway Magazine (an ersatz Vogue) react in a well-orchestrated, mindful panic: Secretaries slip out of their flats and back into heels while checking their lipstick; documents fly, ultimately landing in perfection position on the boss's desk; beneath buried assistants, apparel seems to fly on its own. And the cause of all this hysteria? Meryl Streep's fashionista Editor-in-Chief Miranda Priestly is simply on her way into the office. The camera cuts to painfully chic red and black suede heels first swinging out of a limo, then standing on asphalt -- and the fun's afoot.

MERYL STREEP - Two-time Academy Award-winner Meryl Streep stars as Miranda Priestly, the editor of Runway magazine in the comedy â€œThe Devil Wears Prada.â€• CNS Photo courtesy of Brigitte Lacombe.A Faustian tale of priorities, new college grad Andy Sachs (Anne Hathaway) wants a career in journalism. But the ivory towers of the New York dailies are harder to climb than an Empire State Building swathed in silk. Before she even attempts the climb, lucky Andy is presented with a fairytale-like option: If she agrees to be at Priestly's beck and call for one year, and if she survives, then with one nod from Priestly, Andy will have access to all the right doors and all the right people so that her "real" career will virtually be handed to her.

The dialogue is marvelous. With sly asides to the Madison Avenue conceit that only skeletally-thin women are acceptable ("I'm just one stomach flu away from my goal weight" "Size 6 is the new 14"), the eye candy of a Manhattan that's dressed to kill matches director David Frankel's previous sensibilities as director of "Sex and the City." Added to the mix is a delicious soundtrack, achieving the delicate balance of underscoring scenes without overwhelming them.

Unlike the book, this is far more Streep's vehicle than Lauren Weisberger's original roman Ã clef. Instead of the novel's whiny tirade about an impossible boss and a naÃ¯ve female victim, the film delights, creating much more dimensional characters and an adjusted story that works better than the original. But both the film and book retain an annoying plot point: Although Andy accepts the bargain, her friends and family act in shocked horror at her dedication to the job. The universal prototype of a hellish boss is not foreign. This is part of the movie's charm -- we can all relate at some level to such indignities as no bathroom breaks, fifteen minute lunches, constant criticism and tyrants who expect us to be mindreaders. The very fact that Andy only has to toil under her boss for a year, versus the rest of the world who doesn't get that option, isn't all that terrible. Yet her boyfriend, friends and family turn away in revulsion, as if she's taken to slaughtering puppies. To Hathaway's credit, she's able to maintain the character's sweetness as she politely steps over vipers in the office snake pit. Though the "ugly duckling" (yeah, like Julia Roberts in "Pretty Woman") turns into an Audrey Hepburn-like, designer swan on the outside, Andy hasn't changed on the inside -- she's only grown into a smarter and stronger version of herself.

Framed by a magnificent Stanley Tucci exuding external flamboyance while hiding a deeply human heart, and the comically-frazzled Emily Blunt, Streep's Priestly is dead on. Crooning instead of screaming, slightly pursing her lips to convey extreme displeasure, the manicured hand that rocks this fashion world's cradle is understated yet all-powerful. Screenwriter Aline Brosh McKenna has written to both Streep's comedic and dramatic artistry, allowing us glimpses into the cracking faÃ§ade of a woman who is constantly disappointed by people who can't ever match her exacting expectations. But unlike the hapless Ms. Priestly, this film delivered all its expectations and much, much more.

Grading this movie on the slightest curve of a fashion model's hips: B-plus

Production Credits: "The Devil Wears Prada" Directed by David Frankel Screenplay by Aline Brosh McKenna Based on the novel by Lauren Weisberger Cast: Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Stanley Tucci, Simon Baker, Emily Blunt, Adrian Grenier Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 109 minutes Grade: B-plus

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