Movie Review: 'Nancy Drew'

by David_Elliott

Emma Roberts, spawn of actor Eric Roberts and niece to fabled Julia, is so cute and squinchy and crisply endearing, she was clearly fated to star in "Nancy Drew." She's just right for a demographic slice that figures perfectly fresh Anne Hathaway ("The Devil Wears Prada") is now on the downslope, putting on her Norma Desmond cobwebs.

'NANCY DREW' - Max Thieriot, Josh Flitter and Emma Roberts star in the family mystery movie 'Nancy Drew.' CNS Photo courtesy of Melinda Sue Gordon. Speaking of which, teen sleuth Nancy moves from her perfect Midwestern town (on or near the Burbank lot?) to deep, retro-rooted Beverly Hills. She and dad (Tate Donovan, the current Dean Jones) lease a grand mansion of "Sunset Boulevard" vintage. It's the past and haunted home of mysteriously dead '50s star Dehlia Draycott (Laura Harring, mostly in stills), and sooner than you can squeak "awesome," Nancy sets out to solve the case.

She gets a pudgy tag-along named Corky (Josh Flitter, adorable golf tag-along in "The Greatest Game Ever Played"). She gets snarked by the Hollywood High fox posse led by Jane (Rachael Leigh Cook of "Josie and the Pussycats"), who take some time to see the ginchy charm of Nancy's pert Miss Teen '67 outfits, her darling retro car, her penny loafers and the big ND pin she always wears.

Of course, the Draycott case is cake for Nancy. There's a weird caretaker to deal with, and a massively menacing lawyer, and some thugs from Central Plastic Casting. But our heroine is always first with a hunch and a smile, even bribing a clerk with the immaculate homemade brownie from her purse.

Bruce Willis shows up to cameo as a movie star in a noir film shoot, in sync to discreetly plug "Live Free or Die Hard." This hardly seems the ideal audience for that June 27 action blast, but who knows? Bruce even asks Nancy to direct his film (no issues with the Directors Guild of America, just blocks away).

A recent book on the Nancy Drew mysteries notes that Nancy came along in 1930, just as "the first tampons went on sale." News to Nancy in 2007? Her love life remains virtuously naive, and Betty Boop still thinks she's a square.

But Roberts is surely a charmer, and the quaint plot and middle school (or earlier) spots of humor worked fairly well for a Saturday preview crowd. You do wonder about ace-student Nancy reading "Advanced Sand Castle Making." Time for some Philo Vance, Nance.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Since Nancy is back working, the Hardy Boys must be ready to romp again. They can bring along Andy Hardy (Mickey Rooney needs it), and the cheeky gang from "Ocean's Thirteen" can fill the main roles. They're adolescent enough.

A Warner Bros. release. Director: Andrew Fleming. Writers: Andrew Fleming, Tiffany Paulsen. Cast: Emma Roberts, Josh Flitter, Rachael Leigh Cook, Max Thieriot, Laura Harring. Running time: 1 hour, 28 minutes. Rated PG. 2 stars.