

'Maleficent: Mistress Of Evil' looks beautiful, uses nuptials to start fairy-tale war

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 118 minutes

It has been five years since the villainess from *Sleeping Beauty* was updated and transformed from a malevolent and sinister force into a misunderstood and tortured soul. The resulting film was a box office success, leading to the latest chapter in the series,

Maleficent: Mistress of Evil.

Yes, the title is a bit of a misnomer, since the central character is once again treated poorly by humankind and forced into a situation beyond her control. Kids and those who enjoyed the first film will likely enjoy what they see, but those who weren't charmed by the original won't find anything to convert them in this follow-up.

The story picks up with Princess Aurora (Elle Fanning) and her mother, Maleficent (Angelina Jolie), still tending to the Moors, their magical homeland. When Prince Phillip (Harris Dickinson) of the human realm proposes to Aurora, she accepts and almost all of the kingdom is joyful, knowing that their two worlds will now be able to live in peace (although they were already supposed to be doing this at the end of the previous flick). Anyway, Phillip's mom, the sinister Queen Ingrith (Michelle Pfeiffer) uses the marriage to plot to wipe out the magical world forever. She invites Maleficent to a family dinner and sets her guest up, causing family friction and inciting a war between the two realms.

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It's easy work for Ingrith, seeing as she already has an army of workers under the castle building a massive arsenal that the peaceful King (Robert Lindsay) is somehow completely unaware of.

This film assumes that the viewers will remember and be very familiar with the characters from the original. For those who didn't just watch the first film, it takes some time to catch up on who everyone is. Early on, Jolie wisely tries to infuse some humor into Maleficent as she practices how to behave nicely in the company of her in-laws. But that all changes by the end of the first act, and the remainder of the picture is decidedly more serious with little in the way of amusing jokes.

Like in the first picture, the supporting characters here are archetypes that are thinly drawn, which makes the big emotional moments less involving and their highly dubious decision-making skills feel like mechanizations to move the plot forward. There's one bit late in the film in which a group of characters are trapped in a church with toxic fumes being shot out by a villain while the pipe organ is being played; it takes an interminable amount of time before the group realizes that their predicament might have something to do with the organist.

Admittedly, some of the stranger plot elements and holes won't really upset children in the audience, but they will be a constant issue for adults. In fact, if the protagonists had talked clearly and listened to each other regarding the tragedy, there wouldn't be much of a movie at all. It seems that the filmmakers have to force a way into leaving Maleficent as an outcast exile, feeling hurt and broken because no one believes or trusts her. As such, viewers may feel like they have seen all of this before.

One thing the film does have going for it is incredible visuals. The camera frequently flies through the wondrous fantasy world, spinning around and giving an impressive scope to the pretty environments. There is plenty of spectacle too, as the two kingdoms square off in a giant battle during the finale. However, while the fantasy domain itself is eye-catching, the magical CGI characters are a little tougher to appreciate.

Yes, they are well animated, but many of them aren't given enough to do to make an impact. The three fairies from the first film return and look as unsettling as ever. There's just something distracting and disconcerting about seeing human faces digitized, shrunken and inserted onto computer-animated bodies.

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In the end, *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* looks phenomenal and is filled with plenty of action and drama, but the characters never ingratiate themselves and the story is laid out in too direct and obvious a manner to generate any real suspense. While the picture should still work for tykes, it's unlikely that any adults thinking of going to the movies will be beguiled by what they see.

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