

'Doctor Sleep' works as a horror film, carries the ghost of the original

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

Running Time: 151 minutes

Talk about impossible acts to follow, Stephen King's 1977 novel *The Shining* remains one of the most popular bestsellers in horror. And although director Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film adaption may have had a few detractors during its initial release (mostly due to its icy approach and some significant changes made from the source material), it has grown ever more popular over the years, and is now considered a genuine classic of the genre. While sequels are commonplace these days, few expected a new novel from King devoted to the characters, nor another film nearly 40 years later to update audiences on the lives of the survivors.

This is a difficult film to review, because I am one of those critics who genuinely adores the original and feels like any sort of follow-up is doomed to failure. Alas, *Doctor Sleep* most certainly doesn't live up its predecessor. However, it could have been much worse and several elements work quite effectively. If one keeps their expectations in check and simply goes in hoping for a decent horror picture, they may find it delivering a few chills.

In the years since the terrifying events at the Overlook Hotel, Danny Torrance (Ewan McGregor) has grown up, but is still traumatized. When the drifting protagonist arrives in a small northeastern town, a new acquaintance named Billy (Cliff Curtis) tries to help him find his footing. Danny decides to live a more fulfilling life, taking a position at a hospice. He also forms a telepathic friendship with a young girl Abra Stone (Kyliegh Curran), who lives far away and

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has the same "shining" gift as he does, although in more powerful quantities. Unfortunately, there are many more with these powers and some are sinister.

Rose the Hat (Rebecca Ferguson) and her gang are undead killers who use their powers to kidnap children, torture and drain them of their gift to extend their own lives. After the baddies target Abra, Danny must determine how he can help the girl survive the oncoming attack.

Unfortunately, the story itself involves a few flashbacks to the original that have been reshot, not to mention some new bits involving several characters who have appeared in the previous film. These bits involve some awkward recreations that appear artificial. Obviously, these performers are doing their best impersonations, but at times they feel like little more than that. One supposes that this issue was unavoidable in order to tell the story, but one still gets the impression that a more subtle approach or even voice-overs featuring Shelley Duvall, Jack Nicholson (or a good voice impersonator in the case of another character) might come across in a less jarring manner.

The film also takes some time to get going and finds itself cutting between three different storylines which slows the pacing down early on. Again, this may be due to the screenwriters adapting and following the source material much more closely than the original film did. This feature also really wants to explain the unknown elements explicitly to viewers...what the "shining" is and what the souls within the Overlook Hotel were trying to do many years ago. It does take away some of the mystique to be told that the monsters are essentially energy vampires.

Still, for all of these critiques, when the movie gets moving, there are some excellent thrills and chills. McGregor fares well as the grown-up and tortured Danny, a man who has had to live life on the fringes after the events of his childhood. There's a nice arc as he attempts to fight his fears and do the right thing when danger approaches, even if he endangers himself in the process. Ferguson makes for an appropriately chilling and threatening foe, creating a real sense of unease when she and her band attack each young target. These two performers definitely smooth over and help sell the material.

And there are some very entertaining sequences when all the leads use their telepathic and supernatural gifts to trick and vanquish one another. All the action in the middle of the film is very well handled and there are a few good jolts courtesy of director Mike Flanagan (*Oculus*, *Gerald's Game*

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). In particular, when the group finally meets face to face and comes into conflict in the empty lot of a state park. These scenes are some of the best in the movie.

So overall, the final film is something of a mixed bag. I greatly enjoyed the lead performances and thought that when the characters were in direct conflict, the results were pulse-pounding. However, some of the attempts to directly emulate aspects of the original classic didn't come off quite as smoothly, and the movie doesn't have the same consistently eerie atmosphere or stand-out bits that fans continue to refer back to so many years later. Taken alone as a horror movie, *Doctor Sleep* is a effective chiller, but one that can't quite escape the ghost of its predecessor.

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