

'Cruella' isn't deliciously evil, but does look striking

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

Running Time: 134 minutes

This film from Disney will be released May 28 simultaneously in theaters as well as on Disney+ with Premiere Access and a onetime additional fee.

Disney can't seem to stop itself from producing live-action remakes of its animated titles. Of course, they have been doing this for many years now (even the original *101 Dalmatians* got a live-action redressing in 2000). Their newest attempt is

Cruella

, a prequel of sorts that focuses on the backstory of the famous antagonist. There are some pacing problems in this film and it isn't without some issues.

However, it should impress children and is a visual treat.

Estella aka Cruella (Emma Stone) is a woman who has experienced great tragedy since childhood. After being orphaned and forced to live on the streets as a youth, she finds herself participating in petty crimes with cohorts Jasper (Joel Fry) and Horace (Paul Walter Hauser). Dreaming of working in the world of fashion, the adult Estella actually manages to impress world

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famous designer the Baroness Von Hellman (Emma Thompson). She is hired to work for the baroness's clothing line, but after making inroads, the lead discovers shocking and distressing secrets about her employer.

Estella begins to let her criminal side bloom, developing an alter ego named Cruella de Vil to help her take revenge on the baroness.

The big highlight of this feature is its visuals. Much of it is set in the 1970s and every frame is filled with eye-popping production design and cinematography. As one might expect from a movie that deals with fashion, the elaborate costumes on display are consistently colorful and everything about the movie is as lavish as possible. The film also boasts a constant barrage of music from the era, including some incredible tunes that must have cost a fortune for the filmmakers to license.

Taken simply as an atmosphere piece, the feature is a pleasure to watch.

The story presented is as something of an origin tale, which means that it takes quite a while for the main conflict to develop and for the action to hit its stride. While the visuals help make up for some deficiencies, the actual pacing does feel slow in early sections. The central conflict is also very personal, involving specific grudges between the central characters. It's all entertaining, but the battle between the leads never feels like it will have any major consequences on those around them.

And as you might have guessed, the puppy-skinning antagonist from the original story has been softened significantly. In fact, she has been transformed into a plucky, down-on-her-luck protagonist who has been mistreated by those around her. The film subtly attempts to suggest why Estella might have a problem with the Dalmatian breed in the future and there are certainly actions that suggest a personality disorder. But beyond giving a couple of pointed looks into the camera and dressing like a villainess, there is little about her that suggests a true evil-doer.

At least Stone does her best to try to add some layers to the role as she begins struggling to control her darker instincts. And Emma Thompson makes for an entertaining foe as a selfish, elitist fashionista only concerned about her own public status. While there are a few tricks played between Cruella and the baroness, one can't help but think the story might have

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benefited from making its lead a proper nemesis. It would be fun to watch two nasty outlaws truly go toe-to-toe with no regard for the world around them.

Sadly, the film is far more concerned with making us feel sorry for and like Cruella, than it is with allowing her to be a charismatic wrongdoer.

Like other recent Disney flicks about similar personalities, *Cruella* doesn't make the most of portraying the life of a famous supervillain. That is a shame, but the movie looks so slick and well-produced that it should still entertain families and impress them with a few enjoyable moments and plenty of striking images.

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