

Frankly, I doubt that Disney's Tomorrowland has ever struck anyone as a great jumping off point for a movie. A ride like Space Mountain certainly makes sense, but a project about the plaza on which it's located...? The Tomorrowland movie is a curious experiment that emphasizes mystery as it slowly reveals its grand purpose. But while the film is diverting and fun in spots, it never excites or reaches the heights it should.

As the story begins, the modern world is in terrible shape, nearing an apocalyptic tipping point - apparently, only two people can right the course. There's Frank (George Clooney), a gruff inventor who was once part of a cadre of brilliant minds. That is, before a personal issue caused him to lose his focus. And there's Casey (Britt Robertson), a brilliant teenager struggling with being, well, smarter than everyone around her.

While Clooney is top-billed, the bulk of the film follows Casey. When she discovers a trading pin that shows her a vision of the title location, she becomes determined to find it. However, this proves to be a much trickier task than expected. Chased by Men-in-Black-like figures, Casey encounters Athena (Raffey Cassidy), an enigmatic young girl responsible for the magical buttons. Slowly, the child reveals bits and piece of information about why the teenager is so important to the cause.

This is a great-looking film with some fantastic photography. The gleaming, futuristic city is impressive to behold. It is fully displayed via a complicated and clever one-shot master. This reveal follows a character as she explores the location, overcome with awe. And during the entire journey, there are some impressively shot and edited chases and fights in which the leads must fight to survive. There is also an amusing moment or two as Athena doles out some serious beatings to nasty pursuers.

While there's nothing particularly deep about the story, it is revealed in too complicated a manner. The numerous twists and turns result in a great deal of lengthy exposition. Characters inexplicably keep information close to the chest rather than be explicit as to what is happening. Much is made of a disastrous creation from Tomorrowland that should never have been put into use, but no one elaborates until the climax. This is obviously done to create suspense, but the cryptic conversations dissipate the thrill factor and slow events down.

And despite its spirit of adventure, there's an odd tone. Characters are incinerated by futuristic laser guns (apparently, death rays were not considered a ruinous Tomorrowland invention) and nasty events are occasionally played in too flippant a manner. There's a lot of humor, but it

rarely clicks. As written, the leads feel stiff and their character arcs aren’t easy to relate to. In the end, the big emotional payoff is rather flat and unmoving.

Finally, the movie is awkward in one more respect. From the numerous trading pins, to the rides (Space Mountain and It’s A Small World) and intellectual property in the background (including Star Wars toys and a jet pack right out of The Rocketeer), it really does feel like an extended commercial for all things Disney.

Not including the whole Disney consumerist subtext, the movie’s message is admirable, telling kids to never give up and encouraging them to put their minds to fixing problems. And forgiving viewers may get a simple kick out of the visuals and action. However, there isn’t much else to grasp on to. In the end, this is a bold and at times interesting movie that works in brief spells, but never quite won this reviewer over.

As for what the future holds for Disney, who knows? Epcot: The Movie? The Liberty Square Riverboat Adventure? A Hall of Presidents film adaptation? (Actually, that one is easy to imagine - give me a call, Disney people, if you’d like to hear my take on it.) Based on the mere existence of Tomorrowland, any attraction will be on the drawing boards now.