

'Spectre' brings back old-fashioned 'Bond' formula

Written by By Glenn Kay

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Rating: <<<< *out of 4 stars*

Running Time: 150 min.

I'm a huge James Bond fan, so I'll admit to being biased as far as entries in this spy series go. The previous Daniel Craig films have all been grittier and moodier affairs, even going so far to examine the psychological trails of being an agent and critiquing some of the methods used by MI-5. They've been generally strong efforts, but one is starting to get the impression that the filmmakers are starting to move away from the serious material and focus on the globetrotting adventure.

Spectre almost feels like a homage to the older Sean Connery titles. A sense of dry humor seeps into the proceedings and our hero appears much less tormented than we've seen in the past. Some will criticize the latest movie for lacking the same kind of heft and emotional depth present in the earlier titles. But after three serious installments, it's a bit of a nostalgic kick to see a breezier Bond film involving a larger-than-life foe.

This time out, agent James Bond (Daniel Craig) finds his job on the line when a new bureau head named C (Andrew Scott) arrives and informs M (Ralph Fiennes) that emphasis will now be placed on global surveillance techniques. Ignoring orders, Bond decides to follow up on a lead independently. He infiltrates a nefarious organization named Spectre and identifies its leader, Oberhauser (Christoph Waltz). Along the way, the spy recruits an old nemesis' daughter (Léa Seydoux) to help him.

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There are some serious moments as old characters from the previous three films return and are referred to. But while it's definitely somber in spots, in general it all feels more like the Bond of an earlier era. The villain is quite flippant and his evil plot isn't motivated by emotion or revenge. And a classic antagonist from the series is even re-introduced to audiences. As mentioned, there's an increase in witty banter. Much more of an emphasis is placed on Bond's relationship with Q (Ben Whishaw) and there is some very amusing interplay between the odd couple.

As expected, the action and technical skills are exemplary. From the impressive and lengthy opening master shot (which lasts several minutes and follows Bond from a massive 'Day of the Dead' festival, into a hotel, up an elevator and to a suite before moving onto the street rooftops) through a series of elaborate confrontations, the movie always looks great and pulses with excitement. The highlight may be a train-set dust-up with nasty henchman Hinx (Dave Bautista), which follows the characters as they struggle not only to beat each other, but to seemingly break every piece of furniture onboard.

The exaggerated approach leaves a few questions. The female lead appears in a fancy dress out of the blue in the middle of nowhere and no one on the train seems all that flustered by the incredible destruction of the aforementioned fight. Oberhauser also has the opportunity to kill Bond, but chooses a complicated and elaborate method of slow torture instead. But then again, it all may actually be part of the feature's goal - a homage to the Bond titles of old.

Spectre is a bit slower-moving and the lighter approach may not be everyone's cup of tea, but this reviewer (and fan) had a great time seeing the new cast cut loose and enjoy themselves in a pulpy adventure. This sequel isn't as strong a film as *Casino Royale*, but it's still an awful lot of fun. As popcorn-munching action titles go, Bond still sits at the top of the heap.