

'Ghostbusters' has some laughs, but is choppy and haphazard in execution

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 116 min.

Director Paul Feig (*Bridesmaids*, *Spy*) has made some hilariously funny movies with some very talented comics. His latest, *Ghostbusters*, offers a new take on the beloved 1984 comedy. There's been a lot of controversy surrounding the production, which now seems surprising, given the ultimate quality of the feature itself. In the end, this is a middling, scattershot effort. It's passable and there are a handful of chuckles here and there, but the movie feels equally choppy and haphazard in many respects.

This reboot of the original introduces four new characters taking on a supernatural threat. Erin Gilbert (Kristin Wiig) is a physics professor in New York City, applying for tenure and trying to hide her past from the faculty ... specifically a book about the paranormal she wrote with estranged friend, Abby Yates (Melissa McCarthy). When ghosts begin to pop up all over town, the two are reunited. With the help of tech-head Jillian Holtzmann (Kate McKinnon) and ex-transit worker Patty Tolan (Leslie Jones) the four forge a business to rid the city of spirits. Adding less-than-helpful assistance is the muscular but dim-witted secretary, Kevin (Chris Hemsworth).

First, there are some funny moments when the story breaks away from routine. Wiig and McCarthy are always funny, even though they are forced to deliver more exposition in their roles than usual. And McKinnon and Jones have a few solid one-liners reacting to or commenting on the strangeness they're encountering. When the screenplay gives us something new and different, interest peaks. There's a funny bit involving a creepy, possessed mannequin hunting the group. It's over far too quickly, but offers one of the film's few original (and memorable) dust-ups.

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Unfortunately, some of the weaker elements involve the film playing off of the original. The first scene, featuring a tour guide and the appearance of a ghost, earns a smile. But after a time, the appearances of classic apparitions become more familiar than funny. Since this is a reboot, we also have to endure the business starting from scratch. There are several sequences featuring the Ghostbusters developing their equipment that seem extended and unnecessary. I’d rather have seen this group show their stuff than fall over themselves learning to use their proton packs.

And the numerous cameos are wedged in awkwardly. With the exception of Rick Moranis, just about everyone from the original feature pops up somewhere. One of the surprise appearances around a hearse feels organic to the story and effective; the other four are throwaway moments that don’t offer humor or advance the plot. They ultimately slow the pacing. The movie also suffers greatly from a nebbish, uninterestingly written antagonist who never stands out as a threatening (or even amusing) foe to the ladies.

I’m going to nit-pick here, but one technical issue really began to get on my nerves. The majority of the movie is shot in widescreen 2:35:1, but projected on a 1:85:1 screen. Every now and again, slime, proton beams, and ghosts extend over the black bars of the frame. Most won’t notice this, but it took me right out of the feature every seemingly random time it was used. Another sequence during the climax is suddenly framed at full 1:85:1 before cutting back to 2:35:1. I’m used to multi-aspect ratios and have seen the device used by directors Wes Anderson and Christopher Nolan ... here, it appears arbitrarily applied and is a big distraction.

Of course, many remember the original film as a fun adventure with memorable characters and a breezy charm. Personally, I’m starting to believe it was an incredible fluke. Even the first sequel *Ghostbusters II* (1989) was a weak attempt to recapture the original’s magic. The new *Ghostbusters*

features great talent in front of and behind the camera; it does fare somewhat better than the first sequel and offers a handful of laughs. However, it still feels like we’re witnessing variations on the same theme, only to somewhat diminished returns. It’ll do in the moment, but it’s hard to imagine anyone remembering the film, or much about it, in the years that pass.

Note: There is a post-credits scene that may be the most irksome, eye-rolling element for fans of the original film — a reference to a familiar foe as the starting point for a potential sequel.

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