

THE WALK Features Spectacular Views

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<<< *out of 4 Stars*

Running Time: 123 min.

It isn't often that a movie reviewer will actually suggest paying a premium to check out a film. This week is an exception. The Walk takes the famous story of Philippe Petit's 1974 high-wire walk between the World Trade Center skyscrapers and maximizes the visual content for full impact. The movie itself isn't without some issues, but one cannot watch it without admitting that it looks spectacular. If you've ever considered seeing a movie in IMAX 3D, but were waiting for a title that really takes advantage of depth, this is the one.

The narrative is told through Philippe Petit (Joseph Gordon-Levitt). Petit's story was previously depicted in the exceptional 2008 documentary, Man on Wire. The Frenchman describes his start as a performer and how his unusual dream came to be. Over six years, he is assisted by mentor Papa Rudy (Ben Kingsley) and takes on various accomplices to help him pull off his act of "anarchy." In order to attempt the feat, it also involves sneaking into a massive building full of construction workers and setting up equipment without being seen.

Movies with an odd protagonist and a strange goal can sometimes be difficult to relate to. This movie doesn't get as detailed, or as deep as it should. But, Gordon-Levitt plays the man with a winning personality and a sharp sense of humor. The character is likable and his flowery explanations are a bit silly, but there's just enough information to at least help us understand his motivation. He admits he's "mad" and he may also be an attention seeker, but the film shows us how he develops his specific talent and skill over the years. He's very good at what he does and one could argue that he simply wants to take it to the next level and do something impossible.

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However, some of the human moments featuring cast members feel exaggerated. As the big event approaches, Petit begins to bicker with his significant other and crewmembers around him. These story bits feel as though they are forced in to add human drama and tension to the walk, but they don't feel natural. Obviously, the actors had to compete with the incredible scenery and effects work, and as a result emotional moments are directed in a grander manner than they perhaps needed to be.

It's a minor qualm though, mostly because the movie looks so wonderful. The 3D work is excellent, emphasizing the great distances below. Not only that, but the image incorporates both foreground and background elements effectively. The walker's balancing pole extends out of the screen during certain moments and bolts occasionally pop out of the frame. Some may consider the effect gimmicky, but this reviewer applauds the filmmaker's use of all fields of vision.

While much of the final third may be almost entirely created via green screen, it still looks believable. The secret operation into the building creates some fun caper hi-jinx (particularly when a co-conspirator with a fear of heights is suspended over a shaft running down the entire length of the building). And the stunning walk itself creates genuine moments of tension as Petit moves slowly across the thin line. For a minute or two, the film effectively captures what it must feel like to be suspended in the air hundreds of meters above the ground.

It's certainly a Hollywood retelling of an incredible true story and takes a less-than-subtle approach to the material, but the Gordon-Levitt's likable turn and the technical skills on display make it entertaining nonetheless. The Walk may not be perfect, but it is an enjoyable stroll that features some spectacular views.