

Catwoman: Soulless, boring says reviewer ; Christy Lemire; ; Peterborough Examiner ; 07-24-2004 ;

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If the Spider-Man movies represent all that can be wondrous and inspiring in a comic book adaptation, Catwoman is the absolute opposite.

It's cinema for the attention span-challenged -- a soulless amalgamation of quick edits, computer images and swooping, nausea-inducing dolly shots. The dialogue (credited to four different people) is too awkward to be unintentionally funny and the urban setting is too muddled to be considered gritty. The most egregious sin of all: For an action movie, it's mind-numbingly boring.

Yes, Halle Berry is a jaw-dropping sight to behold in her dominatrix get-up ... er ... Catwoman uniform. But that alone doesn't make a movie, and since all the scenes in which she kicks butt and leaps about with feline agility are sped-up, you don't get to ogle her for long anyway.

Actually, calling this a comic book adaptation isn't completely accurate, since Berry's character, Patience Phillips, has nothing to do with the original Catwoman of the DC Comics series, Selina Kyle, who's previously been portrayed by Julie Newmar, Eartha Kitt and Michelle Pfeiffer. She's not a villain - she's not even a villain with a heart of gold. She just dresses like a bad girl and roams around at night, displaying her frightening martial arts skills, and ends up being mistaken as a criminal.

Patience, we are told, is a meek and lonely graphic designer at a cosmetics company who toils under the tyrannical rule of George Hedare (Lambert Wilson) and his aging supermodel wife, Laurel (Sharon Stone). She has a fantastically bohemian loft and a funky sense of style, but no social life.

But who are we kidding? She looks like Halle Berry, the 2002 best-actress Oscar winner for *Monster's Ball*. The Spider-Man movies derive much of their heart from the fact that Tobey Maguire looks and acts like a regular guy -- an underdog you can easily root for who's intimidated by the awesomeness of his newfound powers.

Patience overhears a conversation in which a scientist divulges that there's something wrong with the company's new anti-aging skin cream -- "We can't let this go on the shelves!" he proclaims indignantly - and is killed by Laurel's thugs. An Egyptian mau with creepy green eyes crawls up on her chest, brings her back to life, and in no time she's prancing along rooftops in a black leather push-up bra and matching low-slung pants, causing chaos with the crack of her whip.

There are a few small, funny moments in which Patience is confused by her new catlike tendencies. She paws at the fish in an aquarium with wild eyes and pads her way delicately across the back of her couch.

And Frances Conroy (*Six Feet Under*) brings a much-needed touch of grace as the nutty cat lady who explains to Patience how she evolved from a mild-mannered artist into an adventurous midnight prowler.

But such scenes are overwhelmed by the film's pervasive clunkiness. Patience's blossoming romance with a police detective (Benjamin Bratt) is an implausible, chemistry-free collection of bland dates and chaste kisses. Of course, he has no idea that the sweet woman he's dating is wreaking havoc at night as the city's most sought-after (alleged) criminal.

Doing the right thing and exposing her former company for its evil deeds requires protracted cat fights -- literally -- with Laurel. The director, who goes by Pitof -- presumably to avoid being confused with Charlie's Angels director McG -- tries to infuse these brawls with a forced sense of Sapphic tension.

If Laurel and Catwoman started making out at the top of the Hedare beauty headquarters, instead of trying to throw each other off it, even that wouldn't make the movie any more interesting.

Illustrations/Photos:

Colour Photo: AP photo / Benjamin Bratt, left, Sharon Stone, center, and Halle Berry arrive at the premiere of Catwoman, July 19, in Los Angeles.

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