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REEL CRITIQUE

Secondhand Lions New Line Starring Haley Joel Osment, Robert Duvall & Michael Caine

Some may have preconceived notions about "Secondhand Lions", the new movie directed and written by Tim McCanlies ("The Iron Giant"). The basic plot: Haley Joel Osment plays a young boy who must go live with his two eccentric uncles, played by Robert Duvall and Michael Caine. Knowing little else about the movie, some may expect it to play out like any clichéd coming-of-age story complete with oldies songs and life lessons learned. Walking out of the movie, the audience will have experienced everything that it expected and given much more.

With wonderful acting by all involved, "Secondhand Lions" is one of those movies that leaves viewers with a special feeling in their hearts as they walk out of the theater. While that last statement must reek with artificial sugar, it is the only way to describe the movie.

Osment has grown a lot since the days of seeing dead people, and viewers will realize it as soon as he opens his mouth. He has made a wise career choice by appearing in this movie, which is sure to be a family pleaser. Osment will not fall into the same trap that other child actors before him have befallen. Duvall and Caine may be showing their age, but they continue to take roles that allow them a chance to use it to their advantage. Full of mischief and ultimately warmth, they generate an aura around them that leaves viewers with little choice but to fall in love with them.

McCanlies has crafted a poignant script full of laughter, heart and a dash of adventure. With the ability to create believable characters in a surreal quasi-fantasy world where anything is possible, the movie takes the innocence of childhood and crafts an ideal world from its shadow. Containing everything from buried treasure, true love and a lion, the story manages to convey the timelessness of a good tale.

With lush cinematography by Jack N. Green, the movie sparkles with life and wonder. The beautiful scenery shot in and around Austin captures the magic of Texas. McCanlies has really outdone himself with his writing and directing. With witty dialogue and often touching moments, this film captures human drama and the ideal childhood perfectly. At one point in the movie, Duvall gives Osment a speech about the art of being a man.

"Damn it!" Duvall says. "If you want to believe in something, then believe in it! Just because something isn't true, that's no reason you can't believe in it!"

McCanlies has a huge future ahead of him and this movie deserves a large box office turnout. With the release of several potential blockbusters

this week, that may not happen, but you shouldn't pass up the chance to watch this wonderful Texan tale.



The Order Twentieth Century Fox Starring Heath Ledger & Shannyn Sossamon

Academy Award-winning screenwriter Brian Koppelman is reunited with stars Heath Ledger and Shannyn Sossamon from 2001's "A Knight's Tale" for his latest film, "The Order."

Produced, written and directed by Helgeland, "The Order" follows a tradition established by movies such as "The Exorcist" and "The Omen" in exploring dark religious themes, though with out as much impact.

Ledger plays Alex Bernier, one of the last remaining members of a special order of priests dedicated to fighting demons and evil spirits. His devotion to the church is compromised when he meets Mara Sinclair, played by Sossamon. Sinclair accompanies Bernier to Rome to investigate the mysterious death of a fellow member of the order.

There he discovers that a sin-eater, who possesses powerful supernatural abilities may be the cause of his friend's demise, and may be after him also. To add to his problems, Bernier is forced to re-evaluate his position as a priest when he becomes involved in an evil plot to bring the Dark Pope into power.

"The Order" runs for one hour and 42 minutes, and the viewer is aware of every second of it. The movie plays at a crawling pace and its dull soundtrack adds to the bleakness.

The audience quickly becomes detached from the story, while the actors' lackluster performances fail to draw them in.

The director and the cast fail to accomplish their main job, which is establishing a connection with the audience.

During the movie, the viewer is left unsure of where it is going and leaves the theater with an empty feeling.

For those movie fans who like a late night viewing experience, be warned—do not watch this movie after midnight. This advice doesn't come from the movie's potential to offer a scary experience, but from its tendency to put its viewers to sleep.



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