

‘Quiz Lady’ wins thanks to star-studded cast

Written by gallupsun

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Rating: 3 out of 4

Running Time: 100 minutes

This film from 20th Century Studios will be released in the United States via the streaming service Hulu on Friday, Nov. 3.

The long history of television game shows isn't a particularly popular subject in cinema, even though witnessing an average person appear in front of millions in a high-stress situation would seem tailor-made for drama. There have been a couple of notable efforts, like the Oscar-nominated Quiz Show and Oscar-winner Slumdog Millionaire, but otherwise they are few and far between. The new comedy

Quiz Lady

certainly isn't designed for awards consideration, but it delivers a cute and amusing little story about two quirky sisters learning how to support one another through trying times.

Anne Yum (Awkwafina) is an awkward bookworm who has spent most of her life in front of the T.V. watching Can't Stop the Quiz, a popular game show. When she receives word that her gambling-obsessed mother has departed the country owing \$80,000 dollars to gang-leader Ken (Jon Park), Anne finds herself in a state of panic. Her estranged, financially strapped older sister Jenny Yum (Sandra Oh) arrives to help out, but is anything but reliable.

When the criminals kidnap Anne's dog and demand payment, Jenny encourages her sister to apply and compete on the game show. In order to earn the required funds, the shy protagonist must overcome being starstruck by host Terry McTeer (Will Ferrell) and defeat reigning champion Ron Heacock (Jason Schwartzman), a man who aims to be the show's longest-running champion.

The approach to the humor is over-the-top and blunt in some respects, with the problems the protagonist faces and her own personal history becoming odder and odder as more details are

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revealed. Anne may be something of a genius, but the situations presented early on involve odd interactions with a harsh neighbor (Holland Taylor) and exaggerated arguments with her sister that employ slapstick humor. It does take a bit of time to get onto the movie’s wavelength and not all of the gags work in the beginning, but the talented leads slowly eke laughs out of their predicament and win viewers over.

And some of those physical gags do make an impact. One bit involving a nasty injury gets used to maximum comedic effect in a hospital waiting room. As the two sisters open up to each other, the humor surrounding their bizarre quest starts landing with more efficiency.

Both Awkwafina and Sandra Oh are charismatic and Oh really gets a chance to stand out with her wild older sister persona that contrasts well with the introverted sibling. Threats made by villain Ken about the kidnapped dog become more surreal and comical. And the screenplay even manages to provide a big unexpected yuk during what first seems like an inspirational (and cliched) speech.

There are plenty of amusing cameos from supporting performers like Tony Hale, Maria Bamford and the late, great Paul Reubens that also hit the mark. And the game show recreations feel accurate with stilted jokes and conversations between the host and contestants. By the time the climax arrives, the film really kicks into high gear as Anne is forced to take the initiative while competing with Ron Heacock. In the end, this reviewer did want to see the characters succeed and overcome their personal issues.

This isn’t a subtle comedy, but after a slow start it delivers more and more effective material. The cast ultimately generates a lot of goodwill and the film finishes on a sweet and likable note, encouraging viewers not to worry too much about failing and also live in the moment, all while promoting the importance of sisterhood. Quiz Lady may not be an all-time champ, but it wins the night and furnishes an enjoyable night of entertainment.

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