

'Confess, Fletch' is a consistently entertaining ride

Written by gallupsun
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Rating: 3 out of 4 stars

Running Time: 98 minutes

This feature from Paramount and Miramax premiered in movie theaters, on digital and on demand Sept. 16.

Based on a series of mystery novels written by Gregory McDonald, the character Fletch first rose to prominence on the big screen in 1985 with Chevy Chase playing the investigative reporter. The original film was a critical and box-office success. It was followed by the occasionally amusing but less effective 1989 sequel, "Fletch Lives," which underperformed at the box office. Since that time, many filmmakers and performers (including Kevin Smith, Zach Braff and Jason Sudeikis) have attempted to revitalize the property, but to no avail. But after 30 years, it seems the figure has finally returned.

Thankfully, "Confess, Fletch" is an effective update that provides plenty of chuckles.

The story picks up with Irwin M. 'Fletch' Fletcher (Jon Hamm) having given up his job as a journalist in order to work on an art history project in Europe. While in Rome, he meets and falls for an Italian woman named Angela (Lorenza Izzo). She tells him that her father has disappeared along with several valuable paintings (including a Picasso) that were promised to her. Angela suspects that her stepmother, The Countess (Marcia Gay Harden) may have done something to her father and stolen the artwork.

Fletch agrees to help and follows the trail to Boston. Unfortunately, he discovers a dead body at his rental apartment and becomes a prime suspect in the murder. While Fletch attempts to clear his name with detectives Monroe (Roy Wood Jr.) and Griz (Ayden Mayeri), he contacts art dealer Horan (Kyle MacLachlan) to try and find the Picasso.

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For those who adore the original movie, this effort appears to be stylized more after the books than previous films. Fletch doesn't wear elaborate costumes, use props or take on outrageous names while investigating and interviewing suspects. Instead, the character charms his targets and slowly ekes the necessary information out of them. But because many of those involved are either snobs or oddball eccentrics, the lead can't help but make pointed comments and subtly use his wit to unsettle them along the way.

It's a clever approach that results in plenty of jests as his awkward interactions progress.

Hamm is definitely up for the part of Fletch, ably delivering witticisms while also allowing himself to take a jab or two on a few occasions (he's also not as quick to figure out the villain's elaborate scheme in this tale as in previous films).

The supporting cast are also very amusing. MacLachlan makes a big impression as Horan, a germophobic art dealer who enjoys electronic dance music. The back and forth between the two characters is consistently funny, as is another interview with a peculiar and nosy neighbor (Annie Mumolo) of the victim.

Even brief moments, like a scene in which the protagonist sneaks into a yacht club party and makes up an elaborate story about one of the members to get himself out of trouble, earns a big smile.

Some of the best interplay comes between Fletch and the police tailing him. Monroe makes a very entertaining impression as a detective struggling to take Fletch down and care for his newborn baby. The conversations even include sports rivalry that is paid off in an amusingly sweet manner at the close of the film. Unlike previous adaptations, the detectives are unconventional but clever, leading to fun back and forth gamesmanship as the story progresses.

Truth be told, the complicated backstories of the characters and mystery itself isn't revelatory. It serves as more of an excuse for the lead to steal some laughs with his surprised responses and shrewd conversations with the supporting cast. The story would also have benefitted from

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putting the lead in more danger far earlier in the film.

However, “Confess, Fletch” is still a consistently entertaining and fun ride. Jon Hamm makes an excellent impression as the title character and this reviewer would be more than happy to see this version of the character return in more follow-ups.

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