

Latest 'Ghostbusters' sequel still doesn't live up to the original

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time:
115 minutes

This film from Sony Pictures opens exclusively in theaters on Friday, March 22.

Back in 1984, the comedy *Ghostbusters* was released into theaters and became a cultural phenomenon. Looking back on the feature, it was truly a rarity that benefitted from contrasting elements. The perfect comic timing of every cast member in the movie maximized every laugh from material more familiar to supernatural (and often scary) films. Even the 1989 sequel with the original cast couldn't quite capture the same magic.

Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire

is the latest follow-up (after 2019's

Ghostbusters: Afterlife)

, mixing new cast members and original stars.

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After the events of the 2019 tale, Callie Spengler (Carrie Coon) and her teenage children Phoebe (Mckenna Grace) and Trevor (Finn Wolfhard) have moved from Oklahoma to Manhattan with science teacher Gary Grooberson (Paul Rudd) and taken over operations at Ghostbusters Headquarters. Curiously enough, friends Podcast (Logan Kim) and Lucky (Celeste O'Connor) have also found a new home in the Big Apple working with ex-ghostbusters Dr. Winston Zeddemore (Ernie Hudson) and Ray Stantz (Dan Aykroyd). Much of the work involves new paranormal research which involves the spiritual possession of inanimate objects. While dealing with this and spectral storage-related issues, the characters come into possession of a mystical orb that contains an ancient evil. It wants to free itself and take revenge on humanity by freezing the planet.

This is only a brief summation of all that is going on in the picture and the personal relationships. Callie and Gary still haven't put a label on their romantic relationship, the teenagers are frustrated at not being given more adult responsibilities, and both also have subplots involving ghosts. There's also trouble from city mayor Walter Peck (William Atherton), who wants to shut their practice down for good.

Additionally, there are plenty of references and bits with the original characters, detailing how their lives are progressing, and a couple of new arrivals. Most memorable is Nadeem Razmaadi (Kumail Nanjiani). He's the figure who finds the orb and is a, well, lazy man who doesn't realize his own latent powers.

So, you can already imagine the major problem that this sequel might possess. There are around a dozen characters featured and a great deal of jumping around between a number of subplots. A couple of tangents involve an amusing gag or two, but peter out and don't pay off effectively.

Truth be told, one wishes the screenplay had removed a couple of extraneous characters and spent more time focusing on a smaller number of individuals. All the cast do the best they can with what they're given, but the result of jamming so much into the running time is that the final product does, at times, feel jumbled. And since the rush prevents fleshing out some of the stronger ideas, not every thread feels necessary.

At least it's a blast to see many original veterans sharing the screen again. While they are all

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credited as being "guest appearances," most are full supporting players. There is a natural and relaxed sense of fun to all of their scenes.

And some new material also works. Nanjiani is extremely funny, delivering great reactions to revelations about his family history and entertaining moments in which he develops his unique skills. There are some chuckles involving family conflict within the ghostbuster family.

Visually, the movie looks impressive, with plenty of familiar and iconic New York locales on display. It also contains a few striking visual effects during the final act with the sinister and its frozen blasts of energy. This all adds a bigger sense of scope to the proceedings.

Yes, the end result is a hit-and-miss affair. But one can appreciate that the film is trying everything it can to entertain audiences. Some subplots and jokes hit the mark, yet just as many don't reach their full potential (due to the constant shuffling of so many characters and subplots). Like every other sequel in this franchise, *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire* can't possibly match the original, but the nostalgia factor and a few new elements that do work ultimately work earn this movie a modest recommendation.

NOTE: For those curious about post-credit scenes, there is one extra gag that is presented after the first round of credits.

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