

Movie Review - Tron Legacy

Written by {ga=mitch}

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I was never that much of a fan of the original 1982 cult classic “Tron”. I found the special effects cheesy and woefully inadequate when compared to other films released earlier, such as “Star Wars”, “The Empire Strikes Back”, both Superman movies and “Alien”. I also found the story itself to be mind-numbingly bad and the characters completely one-dimensional. So I was a bit confused as to why someone thought a remake/sequel was in order.

But it seems that Hollywood is on an 80s reunion tour lately...especially in 2010 with “The A-Team”, “Karate Kid”, “Clash of the Titans”, and “Nightmare on Elm Street” remakes, along with 80s nostalgia from “Grown Ups” and “Hot Tub Time Machine”. We even had a resurrection of icons of the 80s, Gordon Gekko, in “Wall Street 2”, and Sylvester Stallone in “The Expendables”. So I guess it was inevitable that someone would try for a sequel to the old “Tron” chestnut.

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In doing so, Joseph Kosinski, in his first effort as a director, has made a film that is better than the original, but is still weighed down by some of the same problems seen in 1982.

On the plus side, "Tron: Legacy" is a marvel to watch on the big screen. No one will ever complain that the special effects in this film are "cheesy" (at least for another 10 years). The visualization of a world inside a computer (or "grid") is stunning. It may end up being the exact same vision the filmmakers had in 1982, but now the technology supports bringing it to the screen, and like "Avatar" from last year, it is a film that is tailor-made for 3D.

While the CGI that creates the eye-popping effects for killer Frisbee battles, high speed motorcycle chases to the death (in multiple levels this time...so much better than the first film), and dazzling air battles, the most remarkable feat was in the creation of Clu; the Grid version of "the Maker", Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges). I had first heard that they were going to use the same technical process that "aged down" Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen for a flash-back scene in X-Men 3; but I assumed it would only be for a few minutes screen time. Not at all. Clu is a major character in the movie, and it is amazing seeing him (it?) played by what looks like Jeff Bridges in his early 30s. It's not perfect. There is something that looks just a tiny bit unreal about Clu...but that surrealism works in the movie's favor.

There are some decent characters in this film; although I don't think I'd add Clu to that list, as he's just your average evil movie megalomaniac. But I will put Bridges on the list for his portrayal of the almost 60 year old Kevin Flynn. It's not a great character at all, but it is very interesting, as Bridges plays him more as "The Dude" from "The Big Lebowski", rather than having him be just an older version of the one seen in the first film. Flynn has once again been "digitized", and exists inside the computer/grid/whatever the hell it is. But unlike all of the "programs", who are seen in human form, Flynn has aged accordingly. In all of those years (and it might be centuries, given that hours of "our" time translates to perhaps years on the grid), he has developed a Dude level of Zen that has him living in an outlying area to hide from Clu; meditating his time away while he teaches all he knows to a young program named Quorra (pronounced "Cora"), played by the beautiful Olivia Wilde.

Back in the real world, Flynn's son Sam, who was only a boy when his father vanished, is now in his late 20s, and is the Ultimate Slacker. He's dropped out of most everything, but since he still is the majority stockholder in his father's company, he has the ability to torment the Board of

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Directors anytime he feels like with the most juvenile of stunts. Things get put in motion one night when his old mentor Alan Bradley (Bruce Boxleitner, also reprising his role from the original film), challenges him to do better...and tells him about a page he received from Kevin's old office in the arcade that he owned. This leads Sam to discover Kevin's hidden office...where he's also digitized and sent into the grid himself.

Explaining the actual plot once Sam gets into the grid would be an exercise in futility, as there really is no plot, per se. Something about Clu wanting to get Kevin's disc so that Clu can actually reach the outside world, where he would set himself up as a dictator. THAT is the easy part of the description. The rest of it involves adventures, side plots, and twists that are as ludicrous as they are confusing. So much so that eventually, it's best to just watch the visuals, and don't try to think about what they are doing, because it detracts from the point of this movie.

For the rest of the actors, it's very 'hit or miss'. Wilde does a decent job as the mysterious Quorra; quite believable as a kick-ass protector of Sam, a devoted disciple of Kevin, and a wide eyed novice who doesn't seem to quite fit in the world they are in. It's not exactly the type of role one would use to showcase your acting resume, but Wilde makes the best of it.

The same can't be said for Garrett Hedlund as Sam. I know from "Friday Night Lights" (the movie) and "Four Brothers" that Hedlund can act. Had I not seen those two films, I would have dismissed him as a Hayden Christensen level stiff for this performance. It's mostly the fault of the writers for such a weak script and a first time director who can't get an actor to make it work when doing most of his scenes in front of a green screen. But some of the blame must go to Hedlund as well, as he has almost no chemistry at all with either Bridges or Wilde.

There are two great smaller characters that are well worth watching. James Frain, who played the nutso vampire Franklin Mott this season on "True Blood", plays Jarvis, the flunky boot-licker of Clu, and does so by channeling the character of Otho in "Beetlejuice", shamelessly sucking up to whoever he can.

But when it comes to Over the Top, nothing can beat Michael Sheen as Castor. As the entrepreneur of a grid speakeasy, Sheen's character could best be described as a cross between David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust and Joel Grey's Master of Ceremonies from "Cabaret". Sheen obviously has a blast with the extremes of the character, and even though the performance was so out there as to be almost distracting to the flow of the film, it was still an enjoyable little side trip.

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Which is what this movie really is; just a little entertainment side trip on the voyage towards the better films that come out in December. The graphics will get the proper amount of “oohhsss” and “aaahhhsss”, but the film itself is rather forgettable.

Normally, I'd advise people to wait until this came out on DVD/Blu Ray...but the effects are so amazing that I would recommend viewing this on the big screen, and in 3D. You won't hate yourself for it. Unless you try too hard to figure out the plot. In which case, you'll just get a headache.

My Rating: Bill Nelsen (2 ½ footballs).