



My “losing” streak is over, as I have finally seen a 2011 released movie that didn’t induce nausea.

“Hanna” isn’t a great movie by a long shot, but it doesn’t stink, and it kept me entertained throughout, which is saying something given the incredible amount of crap we’ve seen so far this year. That may not be much of a rousing endorsement, but you’ll have to give me a minute to shake off my cynicism before I get into the positives of this interesting and disturbing little action thriller.

The most unusual part of this film is that “Hanna” is at its best when it’s **not** a “thriller”. Don’t get me wrong, the action parts are exciting, if not exactly original. But the true heart of this film is the character study of a young girl/woman as she discovers the real world for the first time in her life.

Knowing the subject matter, I went into the movie with my own pre-conceived notions that it would be a variance of the cult classic “Leon” (aka: “The Professional”), with a well trained hit man teaching his trade to a young girl, with this film going further than “Leon” since Hanna was

older than Mathilda, and assuming that the fate of Leon that stopped Mathilda from learning more would not occur to Hanna.

My preliminary thoughts were both confirmed and denied. Yes, we do get to see a young girl acting as a cold-blooded killer, but the psychological aspects of the movie were very, very different from what I would have expected. This is no "Kick-Ass", with a teenage girl gruesomely killing bad guys for laughs.

As the movie opens, we meet Hanna (Saoirse Ronan) and her world; which consists only of her father (Eric Bana), and their total isolation in a forest above the Arctic Circle in Finland. Every moment of Hanna's life involves training and survival. Hunting for food, practicing martial arts, weapons training, exercise; these activities fill Hanna's days. When she is off her feet, her father is teaching her as well, but it's not exactly the standard version of home schooling. Hanna is taught multiple languages (I counted at least five in which she was fluent), and other subjects that would make her a top assassin. To round out her "education", her father Erik will read to her dry explanations from an encyclopedia about things she has never even dreamt of seeing or experiencing. A blue whale, music, and even what a kiss is. None of that is really important to Erik, so it's just filler for Hanna. "Adapt or Die" is the phrase drilled into Hanna's head by her father.

Why is this happening to her? It seems that Erik is a former top CIA operative who went rogue, taking his infant daughter with him after her mother was killed. He can't risk being found, so he has hidden Hanna away for her entire life, which is so sad on so many levels when you think about a young girl growing up with no other contact with the outside world.

Although I personally think that Hanna might have been closer to 14, they say that her age is 16 when she finally tells her father that she is ready for her mission: Killing the person responsible for her mother's death. This would be Marissa (Cate Blanchett), a cold-as-ice CIA bigwig who still has a huge grudge to both father and daughter. Erik retrieves a tracking device and tells Hanna that when she flips the switch, a team will be sent out thinking that it's Erik, but they will find Hanna instead. This comes about, leading to the first long action sequences as Hanna shows everyone that she's not the harmless little girl they think she is, as she dispatches people faster than what you see in a Schwarzenegger movie, and makes her escape from an underground facility with all of the unrealistic tunnels and secret passageways you'd expect in this type of film.

That is when the movie changes gears, and becomes something special. Hanna is now out in the real world, meeting people for the first time in her life, and we get to see the wonderment in her eyes at each new experience. At a sleazy Moroccan motel she hears music for the first time in her life (her father never sang to her?), and is overwhelmed by all of the electrical appliances and what they can do. Running out, she meets up with a teenage girl from England who she saw earlier in the desert. Sophie (Jessica Barden) is traveling with her ultra hip Bohemian type parents Sebastian (Jason Flemyng) and Rachel (Olivia Williams) and her little brother Miles. While Hanna has too little practical experience interacting with people to be a good liar, she does convince the parents that she has her father's permission to explore on her own, and will be meeting with him in Germany.

The best scenes are with Hanna and Sophie as she learns about friendship and normal relationships. You can see the heartbreak often in Hanna's sparkling blue eyes as she witnesses things and experiences that she never knew were possible, and the regret that she is not able to live the kind of normal life that Sophie enjoys. These scenes truly show Saoirse Ronan as a very talented actress, building upon her breakout performance as the troubled younger sister in "Atonement", which not coincidentally was also directed by Joe Wright. One exceptional scene was when Sophie snuck out of the RV camp with Hanna to go out with a couple of Spanish teenagers they met. Hanna gets to ride on the back of a motorcycle holding tightly to a boy who is not shown at all as a predator, behaving just like teenage girls have been doing for generations.

Her time to enjoy this newfound world is limited, however, as Marissa and her strange chief goon Isaacs (Tom Hollander...who played the foppish Lord Cutler Becket in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movies) are hot on her trail. Erik has also found his way back into the mix, and is trying to find Hanna as well.

The plot itself is riddled with holes and ludicrous little twists, but it still moves sharply and though they may not be Bourne-like, they are close enough to entertain. There are a couple of decent unexpected little twists as well, and these are presented in a manner that is not telegraphed (too badly) at all.

Blanchett and Bana, of course, are great actors. It's good that we know this ahead of time, as the material doesn't exactly allow their acting ability to shine through. Bana's Erik has to be such an enigma that he is almost swallowed up by the black hole of his character's back story. There doesn't seem to be great chemistry between Bana and Ronan, but one gets the feeling that this comes from the obsessive personality of Erik, and not due to any problem with the actors themselves.

Cate Blanchett's character is even more two dimensional. Marissa is the normal movie villain you see in these types of films, and the script gives very little in the form of back story as to what made her such a nasty, evil person. Blanchett appears to know what she's dealing with on that side of it, so she makes the most of it by going full William Shatner and relishing the over-acting and the meanness of the character.

Luckily, Hanna herself is a 100% fleshed out character, and the movie succeeds on Ronan's spot-on performance as she can handle the action sequences and requirements for anger and intensity while still being able to switch gears and show all of the tenderness, vulnerability and sadness of a young woman who now knows and regrets that she's never been allowed to be a little girl.

I normally don't have the highest opinion in the world of sequels...but I find myself hoping for one in this movie. Hanna is a 16 year old Rip Van Winkle out and about in the 21st Century; I would love to know where she goes from here.

My Rating – Frank Ryan (3 Footballs)

Review Key:

Otto Graham: Over 4 Footballs. HOF quality movie

Bernie Kosar: 4 Footballs. Excellent

Brian Sipe: 3 ½ Footballs. Very Good

Frank Ryan: 3 Footballs. Good

Bill Nelsen: 2 ½ Footballs. OK. Worth renting.

Kelly Holcomb: 2 Footballs. Meh. Disappointingly inconsistent but some bright spots.

Tim Couch: 1 ½ Footballs. Poor. Had potential, but lack of support led to an overall stinker.

Derek Anderson: 1 Football. Piss-poor. Frustrating to the level of throwing objects at the screen

Mike Phipps: ½ Football. "We gave away Paul Warfield for THIS?" level of suck beyond redemption.

Spergon Wynn: No Footballs. UberSuckitude personified.