

## Fiery action of 'Hellboy II' enlivened by its creatures

Contributed by Tim Riley  
Sunday, 13 July 2008

### HELLBOY II: THE GOLDEN ARMY (Rated PG-13)

This summer is shaping up as the season for realizing many comic books into silver screen action, and the highly anticipated return of Batman is still around the corner.

But, first, Hellboy, born in the flames of hell and brought to Earth as an infant to perpetrate evil, is back once again, brilliantly conceived by director Guillermo del Toro as a superhero unlike the others, especially with his wisecracking personality.

Affectionately known as Big Red, Hellboy was rescued by American soldiers from occult Nazi forces during World War II. Raised by the benevolent Dr. Trevor Broom (John Hurt) to be the most improbable of heroes, Big Red is extraordinarily tough but has a soft spot for kittens.

'Hellboy II: The Golden Army' requires little knowledge of the prior film. All you need to know about the big red fellow with horns and a sledgehammer for a right hand is explained in the film's opening scenes during his youth at an Army camp.

As an adult in contemporary times, Hellboy (Ron Perlman), a complicated figure, is a reluctant hero only because the public fails to appreciate his good deeds and often questions his motives.

Being the misunderstood figure may arise from Hellboy's hot-tempered attitude and reckless behavior in carrying out missions to destroy the paranormal creatures that frequently surface in Manhattan, bent on destruction of mankind. At least Hellboy always has good intentions.

Hellboy fights the good fight when called to duty by his government handlers at the top-secret Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense, based at a decaying urban site in New Jersey.

Under the command of the officious agent Manning (Jeffrey Tambor), the bureau uses secret technology, mysterious powers and a network of operatives with otherworldly powers to defend the universe against the more violent supernatural forces.

For his part, Hellboy would rather kick back with cigars and a case of Tecate beer, enjoying time with his fickle girlfriend Liz Sherman (Selma Blair) and their clutter of cats.

Meanwhile, an ancient truce is about to be broken in an underworld long ruled by peaceful King Balor (Roy Dotrice), who had created an indestructible mechanical army of golden warriors but locked them up to keep the world safe from annihilation.

The king's evil son, Prince Nuada (Luke Goss), grows impatient in the shadow of his father and becomes increasingly anxious to unleash the dormant army of killing machines that will supposedly return what belongs to his people.

Returning from exile, Prince Nuada shows up at an auction house and destroys the place while retrieving some ancient artifacts. After that, he confronts his father and his twin sister, Princess Nuala (Anna Walton), setting in motion his dastardly plan to conquer the planet.

Assisting Hellboy to save the planet is the volatile Liz, possessing a combustible superpower that allows her to use pyrotechnical skills when things get heated. Of course, Hellboy and Liz generate enough friction as an often bickering couple, where everyday irritations get blown out of proportion.

The intellectual in the good guy paranormal world is the half fish, half mammal Abe Sapien (Doug Jones), who has the power to read objects and know their past or the future. Often more a nuisance than helpful is the new member of the team, Johann (voiced by Seth MacFarlane), a gaseous ectoplasm who is usually annoying.

The plot of 'Hellboy II' is not a big deal, nor does it give much thought in search of a coherent story. This is an all-out action picture, with the juicy scenes bracketed by the paranormal crew involved in romantic or emotional ordeals.

Director del Toro is keen on staging brilliant battles and fight scenes. Moreover, he's brilliantly inspired to roll out some really interesting creatures. The hordes of spider-like tooth fairies that feed voraciously on human flesh and calcium are truly amazing. The secret Troll Market under the Brooklyn Bridge is populated by the craziest assortment of strange beings since the cantina scene in 'Star Wars';

'Hellboy II' is at its creative best when realizing strange worlds from another dimension. Visually stunning for all of its special effects, this film is much more than an artistic endeavor. First and foremost, it's heavy enough on action and battles to be exciting to anyone unfamiliar with the Dark Horse comic book heritage of 'Hellboy,' created by Mike Mignola, who happens to also serve as a co-executive producer for the movie.

#### DVD RELEASE UPDATE

The spoof genre is often good for a lot of laughs, at the cinema or on DVD release. Take, for example, 'The Naked Gun' or 'Scary Movie 4';

From the comedic minds behind these films came 'Superhero Movie,' which follows the misadventures of a high school student after he's been bitten by a mutated dragonfly.

The movie intends to spoof, satirize and skewer the conventions of superhero cinema, poking fun at everything from the 'X-Men' to the 'Fantastic Four.' Sadly, even the presence of Leslie Nielsen and Pamela Anderson can't rescue this weak entry in the spoof genre.

Not intended as a spoof is 'Toxic,' but when it stars legendary porn star Ron Jeremy, rapper Master P and sexy women like Bai Ling and Dominique Swain, you have to wonder if this action thriller about an escaped mental

patient is something other than a joke.

Even though this is a direct to DVD release, &ldquo;Toxic&rdquo; is an offbeat thriller that surpasses expectations and ends up being entertaining.

Tim Riley writes film and television reviews for Lake County News.

{mos\_sb\_discuss:5}