

Spielberg, Cruise Make for a Thrilling "Minority Report"

Written by Mike Schulz

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MINORITY REPORT

Last summer, when Steven Spielberg's science-fiction epic *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* was released, it was greeted with a few rave reviews but near-universal audience apathy. Working from material shepherded by the late Sultan of Cynicism, Stanley Kubrick, Spielberg directed the film as if Kubrick's ghost perched on his shoulder, demanding that every scene be moodier, uglier, and above all

slower

than the one than preceded it; the film was brilliantly designed but emotionally vacant, and it drained you of your energy.

This summer, Spielberg has returned with another sci-fi opus, the futuristic, paranoid thriller *Minority Report*

, and audiences should find it a lot easier to stave off boredom with this one. For the first time since 1997's

The Lost World: Jurassic Park

, Spielberg is looking to give his fans a rousing entertainment, and he's certainly succeeded more than he did with his last dinosaur piece; you'll find plenty of sublime action sequences, humor both smart and broad, an older-and-improved Tom Cruise, colorful performances in small roles, and, as always, technical virtuosity to spare. Yet that damned Kubrickian ghost

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lingers there still. Terrific as most of
Minority Report

is, it's still a little ponderous, and many scenes, particularly near the finale, run on and on to the point of exhaustion. It's a juicy, wonderfully enjoyable 90-minute genre flick ... stretched out to 140 minutes.

The year is 2054, and Washington, D.C., officials have found a way to halt the escalating homicide crisis. Using a trio of psychics, called Pre-Cogs, who can foresee the identity of murderers and their victims, a police force is now legally entitled to arrest potential killers *before* they've committed their crimes; as a result, there hasn't been a homicide in the D.C. area for six years. This program's Chief of Pre-Cime, the stalwart and saddened John Anderton (Cruise), joined the outfit after the disappearance of his young son, and believes the system to be infallible until the Pre-Cogs name

him

as the future murderer of a man he's never heard of. Anderton believes that he's part of an elaborate frame-up, and soon finds himself on the run, trying to simultaneously escape capture and uncover the truth about this particular vision.

One character is immediately established as being the possible ringleader behind this conspiracy: F.B.I. agent Ed Witwer (Colin Farrell), a seemingly heartless bureaucrat who dislikes Anderton from the start, and who is the first hint of the subversive humor Spielberg is going to bring to *Minority Report*. We've all come to expect certain things from a Tom Cruise picture, but what we're not prepared for is for anyone to present themselves as any kind of romantic rival to him; even in a work like *Interview with the Vampire*, in which he co-starred with the likes of Brad Pitt and Antonio Banderas, Cruise is always the prettiest one in the room. But then Colin Farrell arrives, and while he's challenging Cruise's Anderton with the theory that the Pre-Crime division is in no way perfect, his subtext appears to be, "I'm younger than you, I'm better-looking than you, and in a few years, no one's going to remember your name." Cruise appears visibly shaken by the encounter – even though Anderton is our audience surrogate, you truly enjoy watching Farrell knock Cruise for a loop, and only half-guiltily – and it's a key to understanding how

Minority Report

might just present us with Tom Cruise's finest screen performance to date.

Cruise's biggest failing as an actor, beyond his blandness, has always been his cocksure bravado; his characters might suffer, but that shit-eating grin eventually resurfaces by the picture's end, as if all traumas had been effectively wiped clean in a two-hour span. Often sharing scenes, and sometimes entire movies, opposite older actors who serve as "mentors" – I'm remembering Paul Newman, Dustin Hoffman, Jack Nicholson, Gene Hackman, Bryan

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Brown, Robert Duvall, Anthony Hopkins, Vanessa Redgrave, and Sydney Pollock – Cruise has too often allowed himself to be cast as an upstart, one who's gonna show those older folks how it's *really* done, and he generally comes off as shallow. But age might be deepening him. He appears capable of more complex emotions now, and as the film's ticking clock runs, its plot machinations read clearly on Cruise's face as he attempts to work himself out of his dilemma. Scene for scene, Cruise dispenses with vanity and stays blessedly in character. A lot of pumped-up, eccentric character actors – Samantha Morton, Max von Sydow, Lois Smith, Tim Blake Nelson, Peter Stormare, Jason Antoon – pop up in *Minority Report* and give brief, smashing performances, and Cruise keeps up with them every step of the way.

None of this, of course, is why audiences will flock to this sci-fi picture, so let it also be said that the movie is also a technical marvel. Working again with the incredible cinematographer Janusz Kaminski, the director gives *Minority Report* the same high-tech sheen we saw on *A.I.*, yet the film's art direction, visual effects, and composition rival anything Spielberg, or anyone else, has previously attempted. Steven Spielberg pulls off sequences so dizzying you feel like applauding. The movie's visual imagination is its chief pleasure, so space shouldn't be devoted to spoiling most of those treats, but let it be said that several individual scenes – like the one in which a group of mechanical spiders searches for Anderton in a dilapidated building, or in which Spielberg turns a clichéd sequence on its ear by having Anderton, while being hunted, leap from car to car in a *vertical* traffic jam – are jaw-droppingly fine, and Spielberg has a master's knack for combining thrilling effects with great jokes; the product placement for various goods (Pepsi, the Gap, Aquafina, et al) in the film is incessant, and because of how imaginatively, and hilariously, the director incorporated them, I looked forward to every single one.

No one is liable to leave *Minority Report* disappointed, unless, of course, you agree that it could wrap up a hell of a lot sooner than it does. I'm all for movies taking as much time as they need – it's not how long a movie runs that matters, it's how long it

feels

– but it's safe to say that

Minority Report

finds its perfect climax and then, vexingly, continues for another couple of reels. And even *that*

might not have mattered so much if the film's last half-hour wasn't so expository; in the manner of a drawing-room whodunnit, the whys and hows are worked out verbally rather than visually, Spielberg beefs up the film's psychological import, and you can feel a slump in the theatre as the plot limps towards its resolution.

Minority Report

remains top-drawer entertainment, but it's a tad depressing to think that, in the wake of *A.I.*

, even Spielberg's trifles are going to be saddled with the weight of Art.