

Feminist Remakes in the Woke Age

ELIZABETH BANKS' *CHARLIE'S ANGELS* IS LESS CRINGE, MORE FUN

By Taylor Griggs

Consider me a *Charlie's Angels* fangirl. I was captivated by the 2000 film, as much for its bizarre self-aware camp and early-aughts attempts at girl power as for the fact that Drew Barrymore is in it. And this Elizabeth Banks-directed remake for 2019 is — good? Yeah, it's pretty good.

The movie's plot is less important than the one-liner quips (usually coming from Kristen Stewart's Sabina) and the action scenes, which are primarily focused on Jane (newcomer Ella Balinska, who is professionally trained in combat).

One of the most intriguing fight scenes happens at a rock quarry outside Istanbul, where the Angels are faced with the men who want to use a new energy conservation device for evil, invented by Angel recruit and brilliant programmer Elena (Naomi Scott).

There are a few twists and turns, some of which are actually surprising, mostly poking fun at an audience's ability to take a woman seriously. Banks, the quadruple threat who wrote, directed, produced and starred in this film, is fun as the enigmatic Rebekah Bosley, and the ever-wonderful Patrick Stewart plays a minor role as John Bosley (replacing Bill Murray). What's not to like?

Here's the breakdown of the basic problem, which has little to do with the content of this particular film. Capitalism — supposedly the system designed to encourage innovation — has forced 21st-century filmmakers to churn out sequels and remakes to keep the studios alive.

In today's more socially aware market, these studios understand that the original movies — which were probably sexist and maybe homophobic and most likely racist — won't fly anymore. So they helped solidify a brand of



faux-feminism that's so off base only a multimillionaire could've thought it was a good idea.

While it's good for girls and women to see themselves on screen, especially when they're not white and/or heterosexual, it's also weird, because you're pretty much being swindled to make the studio happy. And guess who these studio higher-ups typically are?

You guessed it — straight white men. Cool!

This conflict at the core of *Charlie's Angels* has existed since its conception. The original *Angels* television show

was one of the first times women were prominently featured on TV, especially as cool, smart detectives.

The show has been dismissed for how it objectifies its leading ladies, but it was still a step in a different, more female-driven, direction. It's obviously preferable for pop culture to treat women like well-rounded people, but how sacred are these original renditions of *Angels* anyway? What's the harm in redoing it a few times without canceling the previous attempts?

I was sure this 2019 version would put a lot of emphasis on reclaiming the previous *Charlie's Angels* content, and would reek of desperate false "wokeness" that exists only to pander to the 2019 crowd. There is some of that.

Some might say that there's a lot of it. An out-of-place montage of multiracial womanhood around the world at the beginning of the movie is pretty cringe-inducing, and Elena's "pretty girl programmer" persona misses the mark, substituting stereotypically masculine tech skills for an actual personality.

If, however, this remake strikes you as gag-inducing and obvious feminist pandering, you might be overlooking some of the cheeky self-awareness in the 2000 remake. Barrymore, Cameron Diaz and Lucy Liu are more scantily clad than their 2019 counterparts, and their characters seem more involved in pleasing men. But, ultimately, they're jumping out of airplanes and using their sexuality to trick dumb, ogling men.

It's not like this female-directed version doesn't also have the women showing skin. It caters to the demure-yet-adventurous 2019 crowd — but it's still hot chicks in short skirts. And Stewart, leaving her *Twilight* days fully behind her, does a really good job at suave comic relief.

So, while watching *Charlie's Angels*, take a breath and stop thinking about how terrible it is that feminism has been co-opted to sell movies. Because, honestly, can the common person, historically deprived of seeing really cool women wearing amazing outfits and saving the day, carry this societal burden on her shoulders?

As we joyously left the theater, high on Stewart's surprising charm, my friend commented that, regardless of the cinematic masterpiece of this particular movie, don't women deserve a semi-cheesy, kind of stupid action flick with badass chase sequences and a lot of killing?

Maybe I'm losing my cynicism, but after watching this thoroughly entertaining movie, I'm beginning to think we do. ■

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