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The Asylum is known for its blatant ripoffs of popular films. From SNAKES ON A TRAIN to TRANSMORPHERS to PARANORMAL ENTITY, these “mockbusters” have garnered it a certain notoriety. So it’s no surprise that after Guy Ritchie’s SHERLOCK HOLMES blockbuster, the company would do its own version—with a twist.

Ever wondered what would it look like if Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson had to deal with dinosaurs, giant sea creatures and a flying mechanical dragon? If the answer is this SHERLOCK HOLMES, you win the grand prize: an actual good movie!

Loosely based on the classic stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the film opens in 1940, where an older Watson tells of Holmes’ least-known adventures. The story proper begins when a giant squid takes down a ship, leading Holmes (Ben Syder) to investigate. Joined by the ever-loyal Watson (Gareth David-Lloyd), he starts tracking clues that lead to encounters with a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, that mechanical dragon and a guy in a suit resembling Iron Man (wink wink, nudge nudge). Eventually, we learn that Spring Heeled Jack (Dominic Keating), Holmes’ brother, and his lovely assistant Anesidora Ivory (Elizabeth Arends) are behind all this—their goal is to destroy London and kill the Queen of England.

SHERLOCK HOLMES is a pleasant surprise, coming from the Asylum. The story is quite entertaining and never dull, even in its quieter and more personal moments. And who doesn’t want to see Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson tackle giant beasts and men in iron suits? It may sound ridiculous (OK, maybe it *is* ridiculous), but screenwriter Paul Bales makes it work better than it has any right to. There are some plot holes that are never filled by the end of the film’s 90 minutes (like an unnecessary cliffhanging scene near the middle), but these aren’t overly detrimental.

The characters are also well-written; they may not be all that similar to those from Doyle’s stories, but for the purposes of this film, they’re developed quite nicely and their goals are clearly demonstrated. The dialogue is also a plus, especially the banter between Holmes and Watson. It’s believable and quite charming and endearing. Rachel Lee Goldenberg’s direction is well-paced, and the action, especially a lengthy climactic sequence, is pretty exciting. The cinematography is also pleasing, with Goldenberg using the Welsh locations and sets to her advantage. There’s a sepia tint to the picture, which is a nice touch, and the DVD’s widescreen transfer is quite attractive and clear, without much grain. The movie was clearly made for video, but that’s not an issue because for such a project, the picture is beautiful.

Syder plays Holmes differently than many other past actors (the great detective is shy and soft-spoken here), but he handles the part well and is well-paired with TV veteran David-Lloyd. As Watson, the latter plays the straight man to Syder’s fool, which creates a nice balance and chemistry between the two; you can believe in their friendship and in their disagreements. Add Keating, who’s clearly enjoying himself, as the villain, and you’ve got a topnotch cast for an Asylum production.

Even the CGI by Tiny Juggernaut is OK here. There’s no greenscreen work, but we do get some computer-animated creatures and such that don’t look overly fake, and the special FX worked well overall, blending in nicely with the location photography.

The DVD comes pretty well loaded with extras. There’s an audio commentary in which the moviemakers discuss filming in Wales and how they used the small budget to their advantage, and a nine-minute behind-the-scenes featurette with the cast and crew discussing their experiences shooting SHERLOCK in 14 days. It’s amusing to hear how most of those involved loved the country, while others wanted to get out of there and go home. There’s also a standard blooper reel collecting all the flubs during the shoot; add the trailer, and it’s a decent DVD package.

If you’re a fan of the Asylum or the character of Sherlock Holmes, you’ll most likely pick this one up. If not, SHERLOCK HOLMES is recommended anyway. It’s probably the best Asylum film to date, and worthwhile for anyone who is willing to check reality at the door and just enjoy the silly ride. And that, my friends, is elementary.

MOVIE: ***

DVD PACKAGE: **1/2

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