

SEX AND THE CITY: THE MOVIE __ 4/10

Appreciated yet flawed homage to original

Book Candace Bushnell

Screenplay by Michael Patrick King

Directed by Michael Patrick King

Sarah Jessica Parker ... Carrie Bradshaw

Kim Cattrall ... Samantha Jones

Kristin Davis ... Charlotte York

Cynthia Nixon ... Miranda Hobbes

Chris Noth ... Mr. Big

Candice Bergen ... Enid Frick

Jennifer Hudson ... Louise

"Never try to relive the past: the fire will have become ashes."

— some famous person I can't remember now, who didn't make it into the Google quote pages

Like many moviegoers and Sex and the City series fans, I desperately wanted to fall in love with this movie as much as I had fallen in love with practically everything about the TV show. Alas, my subtitle speaks with kid gloves only because of the enormous respect I had for that groundbreaking creative enterprise on HBO, Sunday nights—running from 1998 to 2004 with a total of 94 episodes. But if I'm Ebert and/or Roeper, all honesty requires a thumbs down... even a 'way down:'

An obvious boner right off the top: "What in the holy hallelujah is Jennifer Hudson doing in this movie?!"

SATC is, of course, the ultimate chick-flick entertainment, and a number of feminine foursomes of 20-somethings to 50-somethings are in the audience in the Okemos, Michigan, theater my lady friend takes me to. From the gitgo, everything is cool: Mr. Big, after years of dithering—a large amount of that time seems to transpire on the screen before us—has finally asked Carrie to marry him. [He'd be fine living together, but he wants to reward her desire to have the long-term commitment symbolized by the ring and the ultimate Queen-for-a-Day ceremony (which he relents to).]

And that's about as much of the plot as I'll be specific about.

For those who have not yet seen the original series, let me provide a brief synopsis: Carrie, Samantha, Miranda, and Charlotte have come to New York City as young women—all but 40-something Samantha are in their early 30s—looking for love, excitement, and simply being part of the magic of the Big Apple. They become best friends, spending their leisure time together, chatting over martinis (or Cosmos) and Sunday brunch, airing out their concerns with sex, men, and relationships over the phone, heart-to-heart, and eye-to-eye. Each has a distinct aura:

- ❑ Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker) serves as the first among equals, generally providing the voice giving meaning to whatever issues are being aired this week. She is well-known writer of a local life column on relationships, where she shares her own experiences with her readers... and, cleverly, the TV audience.
- ❑ Samantha (Kim Cattrall) is an enthusiastic seeker of sexual fulfillment: she wants to take as big a bite as possible out of life and doesn't usually get no for an answer. She likes it and life, a lot, and she's happy with herself. Damn, where were women like her when I needed them?! Samantha is not inclined to settle down, but despite herself she does go through occasional periods of the love bug.
- ❑ Miranda is the career woman, also with a healthy appetite for steamy sex, especially if it should lead to true romance. Of all the women, Miranda, a high-powered attorney, is the most driven and cerebral; she's also the perfect witty foil for the back-and-forth among the other girls... especially Carrie. [Carrie's writings provide a constant backdrop of humor and satire for the girls' sometimes scintillating, frequently salacious, repartee.]

- ❑ Charlotte (Kristin Davis), my personal favorite, is the naive idealist, whose somewhat prudish instincts play well against Samantha's frank sexual assertiveness. Charlotte is more firmly attached to the American dream of love and marriage between sweethearts forever, accompanied by beautiful children, of course. But like all the women, she has an intelligent, artistic, creative side to make her incredibly interesting.

The writers of the series give us believable and mostly charming scenes with a wide assortment of characters in rapid succession. When you come up for air, you realize what the girls are all about is simply and universally life—sure it's life in the fast lane, a lot of issues related to sex, and it's New York City; but frequently after an episode I'd be asking myself questions regarding basic morality: "What would I do if I were in her/his shoes?" It's hard to be judgmental in any case.

So fast forward 10 years from the beginning of the series to 2008, where the girls are in their 40s (I'll give away that Samantha celebrates her 50th in the movie), and some decisions about their romantic futures have to be made. Now I'm not going to reveal what specifically I find annoying in their choices or behavior, but except for Charlotte—a sweet thing like that could never do anything wrong—I'm thinking how cruel can the writer(s) be to turn on the "totally irrational" switch for these babes. Candidly, what I see from Carrie, Samantha, and Miranda are enough to sour me on them: "If that's the way you're going to be, I'm wondering what I ever saw in you in the first place."

Naturally, mine is a guy perspective. But in the series when one of the girls makes a bonehead move, it becomes a vehicle for smart banter and clever insight... leading to a happy or funny outcome. In the movie, I think the writers just spent too much time thinking—worrying about the reputation of the series, or about staying politically correct with feminists and blacks [this has to be the sole explanation for Jennifer Hudson's presence], or about creating a positive image for New York, etc., etc.—and not enough time staying fresh, creative, and, yes, carefree. As a writer, I know what it's like to be stuck, and I think fundamentally the movie was "stuck" by expectations and possibly internal creative conflict.

The women are now showing normal signs of age, what's that phrase, "the dew is off the bloom." And I can imagine the writers wanted to deal honestly with the women's mature condition vis a vis the sexually charged, raging-pheromone atmosphere characterizing the 'girls' in the series. Hey, life marches on, and I'm not trying to pick on the writer(s); they put together an honest effort, but I don't think the good guys won. As evidence, [note: the following is giving away a halfway-relevant scene] I'll bring up the situation in a resort environment where Carrie is depressed and nothing the girls do can cheer her up... except, finally, Charlotte has an embarrassing incident with her bowels. Which brings on the guffaws, and takes Carrie out of her funk.]

C'mon guys, that's so totally pathetic and unimaginative... and not even remotely funny.

Finally, the movie is distressingly long. I found myself going for extra popcorn and looking at my watch. Here's a film that simple editing discipline might have improved considerably: cut half an hour from the two hours and think of how many boring or offensive scenes you would have removed. Actually, the movie was a painful experience. But there was a very small amount of humor and the photography seemed pretty good... maybe, I guess.

I still so love and miss the *rea*/Carrie, Samantha, Miranda, and Charlotte.

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