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Berlinale FILM CAPSULE: The Lost City of Z (Gray, 2016): Ireland

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

James Gray directs *The Lost City of Z*, his adaptation of the David Grann book â??The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon.â?• A Plan B Production starring Charlie Hunnam, Sienna Miller, Robert Pattinson, and Tom Holland, *The Lost City of Z* tells the real-life story of Col. Percival â??Percyâ?• Fawcett and his search for the existence of a mysterious, sunken metropolis â?? the City of Z. Along the way, Gray delivers social commentary on the social norms during a time of tremendous scientific and social upheaval.

The film opens with a military social where Percy sees his ambitions diminished as he is classed as having been born with â??unfortunate ancestors.â?• Percy, played by Brit Charlie Hunnam (*Sons of Anarchy*) finds climbing the military ranks in 1920â??s England a cumbersome ordeal. Seeking promotion and the financial security it will bring, Percy accepts a land surveying mission in Bolivia. Military trained and hardened with discipline, Percy thrives in the harsh environment where others falter.

After the 1911 expedition, Percy returns full of vigor detailing the stories he has heard of the Lost Civilization and having felt remnants of an ancient civilization in his bare hands and acquiesces to going back into the jungle for deeper expeditions to provide a comfortable life for his family. His children are small. His wife capable. As he reconnects with his wife Nina (Sienna Miller), he stimulates her interest in the lost city and reignites the passion the two had always shared. In a heartfelt moment, Nina proposes they return to the Amazon and find the lost civilization together.

In May of 1912, Percy returns to the Amazon with his expeditionary team leaving Nina to look after the children. Here the filmmaking opens up. The production design becomes quite plush. Director of Photography Darius Khondji frames exquisite jungle shots. The musical score and diagetic sounds from Christopher Spelman complement and enhance the luscious mise-en-scene and aid in the filmâ??s storytelling. The narrative is chronological and carries the film quite well with two diverse settings â?? the familial setting in Ireland and the expeditionary setting in the Amazon jungle.

Pushing through unmapped territory in the Amazon, the expedition is confronted by a tribe of cannibals preparing for dinner. An already despondent team has had enough of Percyâ??s ramrodding them deeper and deeper into the unknown where danger seems to be awaiting with each step.

Nevertheless, Percy continues his almost maniacal pursuit citing the military commanderâ??s need for critical information. A ranking member of the team begins sloughing off eventually ruining any chance of continuing the expedition and the team achieving its stated mission. The team is forced to return home much with Percy vowing to return.

The First World War breaks out and all expeditions to the Amazon are put on hold. In combat (trench warfare) Percy suffers from chlorine gas exposure. While recovering, Percy and his son Jack (Tom Holland), now a grown man, reconnect with Jack coming to admire and respect his father immensely. So much so that Jack proposes the two go back to the Amazon and find the Lost City of Z together. Percy makes a bold proposal to the Royal Geographic Society (RGS) on returning to find the Lost City of Z with his son Jack. A stupefied RGS appears dumbfounded as they give Percy approval with his stated stipulations.

Percy and Jack renew the search for the Lost City of Z and what transpires there remains a mystery today. Stories and remnants of truths spontaneously make their way back to Nina indicating Percy and Jack found the Lost City of Z and have chosen to stay there for the time being. Nina never lost hope that Percy and Jack would someday return.

Grayâ??s *The Lost City of Z* is a grand tale, well told with strong, compelling acting. Hunnam understands character arc and itâ??s a viewing treat to watch him unfold and develop the powerful, inner character of Colonel Percival Fawcett. Sienna Miller turns in a masterful performance as the doting, supportive wife, Nina. Kate Ringsell managed the filmâ??s casting.

The production design is as good as it gets with Production Designer Jean-Vincent Puzos providing breath-taking and often, stunning glimpses of jungle life as well as the enchanting landscape of Ireland. *The Lost City of Z* is also a solid period piece with excellent costuming provided by Sonia Grande. Highly recommended film.

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