Snow White and the Huntsman
PG-13
127 Minutes
Rating: ****

It would have been so easy for this movie to be a bust. The scriptwriters could have rewritten the original fairy tale to be more Politically Correct. The director could have gone for low camp instead of high fantasy. The actors could have mailed it in. But instead, everyone involved takes the high road, and the result is one of the best sword and sorcery films since Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings trilogy.

The basic story is of course the one we all grew up with...more or less. Snow White (Kristen Stewart), the young and pure princess, is imprisoned by her evil stepmother, the queen Ravenna (Charlize Thereon), a sorceress who maintains her unfading vitality and beauty by literally draining the life from other beautiful girls. But Snow White escapes, and flees into the haunted Dark Forest, where even Ravenna's soldiers fear to go. But the evil spirit that lives within Ravenna’s enchanted mirror has promised her unfailing immortality if only she consumes Snow White’s heart, and so the wicked queen brings in a disillusioned, shiftless Huntsman to track the princess down. But as he pursues his quarry, the Huntsman (Chris Hemsworth) realizes there is something special about Snow White, and gradually rediscovers a purpose in a life he believed gone with the death of his beloved wife. But can even the brave Huntsman save Snow White from Ravenna’s evil wrath?

Naturally, the filmmakers had to fill in some of the blanks from the original and rather Spartan fairy tale, and so the film does take some dramatic liberties with the basic story. But fortunately, none of those liberties detract from the essential essence of what has made that story eternally appealing. The dwarves are present and accounted for, albeit reincarnated as a motley band of forest outlaws who find themselves caught up in Snow White’s cause almost despite themselves. And yes, there is a prince, a childhood friend of Snow White’s who stands against Ravenna and is devoted to the young princess. The moral of the story remains unchanged: real beauty is more than skin deep, and even the most powerful evil is no match for true love.

The movie looks absolutely amazing, from foreboding gothic towers to lush, fairy-kissed forest glades or troll-haunted stone bridges. The film looks like a fairy tale come to life, and nothing intrudes upon the magical atmosphere. Director Rupert Sanders manages everything with a steady hand, and while the story is definitely fun it never loses touch with its inherently serious themes. The action scenes are spectacular, and even though the film is never gory there is a very high body count.

And while this reviewer was a little skeptical of Twilight’s Kristen Stewart taking on the role of Snow White, she nails it. Not only is she ethereally lovely, but Stewart plays the part with a gravity and bearing totally foreign to any other part I have seen her in. It is almost certainly the best performance of her career. Chris Hemsworth is a good choice for the brave and heroic Huntsman, and this is one of several recent hits for the young actor. But the standout performance is surely Charlize Thereon’s evil queen. It’s often said that actors love to play villains, and it certainly appears that Thereon is having a ball as the wicked, vain, and totally
ruthless sorceress. She radiates evil so intensely the screen virtually burns every time she steps in front the camera. Thereon’s Ravenna is definitely one of those villains you love to hate.

*Snow White and the Hunstman* should make moviegoers across the board happy. Fans of fantasy will love it, as will those who grew up with Grimm’s fairy tale and would love to see a generally faithful version for adults. Even graded solely as an action film, it gets high marks. If any of those categories appeal to you, don’t hesitate to give *Snow White and the Hunstman* a try...it will certainly cast a spell on you.