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# Dark and Dazzling: Saltburn Brings Gothic Mystique to the Big Screen [REVIEW]

Callie Solberg, Volunteer Reporter

Emerald Fennell's latest psychological thriller-comedy crossover, "Saltburn", has generated considerable buzz since it first premiered on August 31st at the 50th Telluride Film Festival in Colorado. The film was an immediate hit, complete with a star-studded cast featuring performances from Jacob Elordi, Barry Keoghan and Rosamund Pike. Layered with a glittery, gothic aesthetic, the film immediately ensnares audiences.

A pivotal factor of the film's initial success is the casting of 26-year-old Australian actor Jacob Elordi. He recently starred as Elvis Presley alongside Cailee Spaeny in Sofia Coppola's biopic "Priscilla." His previous roles in "The Kissing Booth" trilogy and the HBO series "Euphoria" propelled him into the spotlight, giving him an opportunity to take on more serious roles, such as Felix Catton in "Saltburn".

Co-star Barry Keoghan takes center stage, captivating audiences with a compelling performance as the ambitious, seemingly introverted Oliver Quick. If you liked him in "The Killing of a Sacred Deer" (2017), you won't want to miss this movie.

Fennell's directorial debut arrived at the Sundance Film Festival in 2020 with the release of "Promising Young Woman," a dark comedy and thriller with plenty of parallels to her latest film. The movie was received positively by audiences and won Best Original Screenplay at the 93rd Academy Awards as well as garnering numerous nominations for Best Director, Best Picture, Best Actress and Best Film Editing. Among the co-producers were Margot Robbie and her husband, Tom Ackerly.

For any fans of Fennell's first film or other films such as "The Talented Mr. Ripley" (1999), "Call Me By Your Name" (2018), "Atonement" (2007) and "Parasite" (2019), "Saltburn" will certainly not disappoint. The central themes of the film explore the delicate balances and evolution of obsession, class divide, violence, desire, sex, identity, wealth and power.

In an interview with Dakota Warren, Fennell remarked on where she drew inspiration for the source material and design.

“I’ve always felt very strongly that in order to make something uncanny you have to make it feel familiar first.”

The aesthetics of the film are a notable component of the overall dazzling and dark ambience present throughout the story. From shadowy ivy league buildings to candelabra-clad dinners, maze-like mansions, sun-drenched estates and fluorescent, drug-filled parties, the film exudes a modern, mysterious old-money aura.

Seattle local Kelly Stroh emphasized the film’s contrasting choices.

“There were definitely moments that stood out to me, like the season in which it was set. Gothic tales are typically set in darker months and have a darker feel to them, but a lot of the film was set outside in the sunshine or by the pond. At the same time, there were moments that reminded you that this film, like most gothic stories, won’t have a happy ending and there is a darker quality to them,” Stroh said.

She also praised the film’s visuals.

“I loved the movie. As someone who loves all things gothic, it had been years since I felt a movie fully and wonderfully portrayed the elements of mystery, fear, romance, emotionally heavy setting, with a storyline that surrounds a massive house or castle—all of which are vital pieces of the classic gothic thriller,” Stroh said.

One thing is for certain: Fennell’s movies are not easy to categorize into one simple genre. Blair Stokes noted how the film transcended a straightforward horror flick, describing the movie as a “bubblegum psychological thriller period piece.”

“I use the word bubblegum because it was so gorgeous and aesthetic. It was much more visceral, graphic and disquieting than a traditional thriller. It definitely subverted the genre!” Stokes said.

Saltburn is currently screening in theaters.



"Saltburn" poster. Courtesy of MGM Studios.