

‘The House With a Clock in Its Walls’ is Movie Magic

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 20, 2018 - 11:43pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “The House With The Clock In Its Walls” is a surprisingly restrained and endearing haunted house pic for kids just getting rid of their training wheels. It’s all a spooky atmosphere with cobwebs galore, creaking doors, a stained glass window which changes on its own, and a library of books which at times resemble the avifauna predators from the Hitchcock classic “The Birds.”

Young orphan Lewis (Owen Vaccaro) is sent to live with his eccentric kimono wearing uncle Jonathan (Jack Black) in small town Michigan after his parents are killed in a car crash. He soon discovers that his uncle is a warlock, albeit a mediocre one. But his next door neighbor, Mrs. Zimmerman (Cate Blanchett), is a much more powerful purple clad witch. Together, they trade insults like Ralph and Alice on “The Honeymooners,” but with knowing glances as they maintain a solid but platonic friendship. Jack Black seems right at home in this frolic full of fantasy, cocking an eyebrow and getting remarkable mileage out of simply uttering the word “creepy.” Ms. Blanchett sports an occasional French accent and wields the most powerful umbrella this side of Mary Poppins.



The Cast of ‘The House With a Clock in Its Walls’

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

The house was previously owned by a wicked warlock named Edward Izzard (Kyle McLaughlin), who died after attempting to cast a blood spell... but not before leaving a doomsday clock hidden inside the walls. Uncle Jonathan has tried to drown out the sound by filling his house with wall to wall timepieces, yet at night he prowls around looking for the location of the clock slowly ticking down inside the home.

Meanwhile, Lewis has to contend with the hazards of school getting picked last for basketball even behind the kid on crutches. His desire to impress the popular kid Tarby (Sunny Suljic, looking like a reincarnation of a "Goonies" era Corey Feldman) leads him to accidentally wake the dead and bring the evil warlock back to life.

Goodness knows, there are a lot of films that have tried to become the next Harry Potter by thrusting a CGI monster around every corner... but surprisingly enough this film isn't loaded down with wall-to-wall special effects. The simplest stories often contain the most charm. There are endearing parts of the house, such as the garden Griffen who poops leaves, a friendly suit of armor walking about, or the arm chair that follows around the occupants like a particularly affectionate puppy, as well as a terrifying collection of mechanical curios. I wouldn't quite call the end result "spellbinding," but there's a reasonable amount of actual movie magic instead of just overloading on CGI. This is a kid flick after all, but there's also a lot of potty humor thrown in, that seems to just come out of nowhere.



Tea Time at 'The House With a Clock in Its Walls'

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

"The House With The Clock In Its Walls" had my 6-year-old twins putting their hands over their eyes a couple of times, but it doesn't contain anything that will give them nightmares. The climax involving zombies, a giant clock, a magic 8-ball, and a baby with a full-grown beard is a bit intense, but they both enjoyed it. It's a bit of a throwback in accurately recreating the aura of the Amblin (Steven Spielberg-produced) Entertainment movies of old. It's a fun kid movie for little ones who aren't afraid of things that go bump in the night.

"The House With a Clock in Its Walls" opens everywhere in on September 21st, in IMAX and regular screenings. See local listings for IMAX theaters and show times. Featuring Jack Black, Cate Blanchett, Owen Vaccaro, Kyle McLachlan and Colleen Camp. Screenplay adapted by Eric Kripke, from a novel by John Bellairs. Directed by Eli Roth. Rated "PG"



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By [SPIKE WALTERS](#) [16]

Contributor

HollywoodChicago.com

spike@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

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