

Adventures in Babysitting ★★★

Year of Release: 1987

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

Adventures in Babysitting is mindless, formulaic, unsophisticated, and disposable—and I thoroughly enjoyed it. We've seen the premise of the movie before, most recently in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. On a Friday night, four suburban youngsters venture out into the unfamiliar city (in this case, Chicago) and suffer through an exhausting series of misadventures. Elizabeth Shue plays a beautiful baby-sitter who is responsible for looking after a little girl (who idolizes the superhero Thor), her 15-year-old brother (who is smitten by Shue), and his wild friend.

Adventures in Babysitting wants us to believe that during the course of their escapades, these four youngsters come to better understand themselves and each other. By the end of the movie, they are supposed to be wiser and more mature than they were at the beginning. However, the plot situations in *Adventures in Babysitting*, as well as the relationships between the characters and the lessons they learn, are altogether unoriginal. The movie does not balance its extreme fantasy with a strong enough dose of reality. The fantasy is amusing but sometimes so exaggerated that first-time director Chris Columbus undermines his own attempts to generate any real dramatic credibility; a case in point is the scene in which the little girl gets stranded on a window ledge 40 stories high. And yet despite these considerations, *Adventures in Babysitting* is irresistibly entertaining, thanks to its charming cast and keen sense of humor.

The success of *Adventures in Babysitting* lies primarily on the shoulders of four young, unproven actors. These four newcomers appear in nearly every frame of the film, and consequently the strength of their performances determines whether the movie floats or sinks. *Adventures in Babysitting* not only floats, it sails. The young actors save the film from its limitations and make it a worthwhile endeavor.

Elizabeth Shue, as the reluctant baby-sitter, is a

natural; her performance is enchanting. She is a joy to watch from beginning to end and seems completely comfortable in front of the camera. With a mischievous twinkle in her eye, Maia Brewton is cute and convincing as the Thor-loving little girl who likes to tease her brother, steal éclairs, and sometimes even climb skyscrapers. Keith Coogan plays the little girl's 15-year-old brother, Brad, a freshman with a big crush on Shue (a senior). Coogan gives his character a delightful balance of awkwardness, embarrassment, bravado, and charm. He is particularly effective in the scenes that deal with his hopeless admiration and growing respect for Shue. Although Anthony Rapp's role as Brad's friend is less substantial, he is appealing nevertheless.

The movie's loosely-structured plot is merely an excuse to have these characters come together and interact. These four young newcomers have such great chemistry that you grow quite fond of them, even in an uninspired and cliché-ridden story.

Adventures in Babysitting has another thing going for it: a wonderful sense of humor. Several scenes in the film are exceptionally clever. For example, Shue and her three wards at one point find themselves singing the blues in an all-black nightclub. The sequence yields the movie's funniest one-liner.

Regrettably, the movie fails to make a lasting impression. The characters don't learn anything new, unusual, or enlightening from their adventures. Unlike *The Breakfast Club*, a superior film which successfully combined comedy and drama, *Adventures in Babysitting* has very little dramatic intensity or lingering emotional impact. Columbus introduces several serious, underlying themes into the movie, but he never fully develops them. In any case, *Adventures in Babysitting* does succeed in fulfilling its primary function, which is to provide diverting, humorous, and (alas) forgettable summer entertainment.