

Hanna TV adaptation sacrifices magic of original film for typical teen angst



Enlarge / Esme Creed-Miles plays the titular teen assassin in Amazon Prime's new series, *Hanna*.
YouTube/Amazon Prime

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An isolated teenaged girl genetically engineered to be an assassin must elude rogue CIA agents intent on terminating her in *Hanna*, Amazon's adaption of the 2011 film of the same name. It's a gritty, competent thriller, with strong performances from a talented cast, and has already been renewed for a

second season. The problem is that no matter how much one tries to separate the series from the film, comparisons are inevitable. And in almost all respects, the TV adaptation comes up short.

(Some spoilers for the series and the 2011 film below.)

Not everyone was a fan of Director Joe Wright's original film, with its strange mix of espionage and dark coming-of-age fairytale. But it's one of my recent favorites for precisely those elements, driven by an exquisitely unsettling performance by Saoirse Ronan in the titular role. Ronan had this otherworldly presence of untouched innocence, combined with a ruthless hunter's instinct, as we saw in the very first scene when she kills and dresses a deer with just a bow and arrow and a hunting knife.

In the film, Hanna is raised in the wilderness by her father, Erik Heller (Eric Bana), an ex-CIA operative who trains her in all the skills she needs to survive—not just in their winter fairytale, but in the brutal world outside. We eventually find out that she was part of a government program to genetically engineer children as trained assassins. When the project went south, the children were all killed—except for Hanna, because Erik rescued her. Now the teenaged Hanna is ready to leave the nest. Her mission: to take out Marissa Wiegler (Cate Blanchett), the woman who ran the secret project that produced Hanna, who will most certainly have her killed if she finds out Hannah is alive.

What was missing from the early teasers for the series was anything resembling that other-worldly cautionary fairytale quality that made the original *Hanna* so evocative and memorable (even if those elements weren't to everybody's taste). It's missing from the full series, too, even though it recreates several key scenes, most notably Hanna's first encounter with a woman pretending to be Marissa and subsequent escape from the military enclave where she's being held. It's

a pale reflection of the original. All the same beats are in place, but the sequence feels flat, lacking the same heart-pounding energy.

- Erik Heller (Joel Kinnaman) flees through the woods with a stolen infant.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Heller trains a now-teenaged Hanna (Esme Creed-Miles)
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Hanna defies her father and meets a cute boy, Arvo (Aleksandr Gorchilin).
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Not a great end to an otherwise romantic evening: a special ops helicopter intrudes.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Erik and Hanna are discovered and must flee.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Erik is an ex-CIA operative from Germany.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Marissa Wiegler (Mireille Enos) is an agent seeking to take out Erik and Hannah.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- A famous scene from the film version plays out on Marissa's tablet.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Rhianne Barreto plays Sophie, an English teen who befriends a fugitive Hanna.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Hanna finds romance yet again.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Ever watchful, even while bidding Sophie farewell.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- "Bury Heller, bury the past," Marissa tells her off-the-books operative.
YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Erik and Hanna in lethal action.

YouTube/Amazon Prime

There's little mystery about Hanna herself, since the series opens with Erik Heller (Joel Kinnaman) stealing baby Hanna from the Utrex facility and follows a relentlessly linear chronology throughout. There are also several unnecessary subplots involving Erik seeking out his old army buddies to raid an arms cache, visiting his mother, or taking Hanna to meet her biological father. All that extra narrative padding mostly serves to try the viewer's patience.

Esme Creed-Miles (*Dark River*) was a huge fan of the original film, and delivers a strong performance as Hanna. But she's hampered by the writers' determination to bring in elements of a much more typical coming-of-age tale. In the process, her character gets watered down to a distressing degree. This Hanna has a lot more stereotypical (read: tedious) teen angst. In the pilot, she chafes at Erik's restricting her movements within the forest. She defies him to meet a cute boy in the woods, and that bad decision lets Marissa's men find them, forcing Hanna and Erik to flee. Film Hanna would never have done this; she chooses when she's ready to leave and deliberately reveals their location, with Erik's blessing. It's a critical distinction. And it's not the last bad decision TV Hanna makes.

The one character that really benefits from the transfer from big to small screen is Marissa Wiegler, played by Mireille Enos in the series. Blanchett made a deliciously evil queen as Film Marissa, but we never learned much about her background or motivations for issuing all those orders to torture and kill. Enos portrays a much more complicated woman, in a rocky relationship with a single father despite her pronounced lack of maternal instincts, and has some regrets about her past dark actions. She's more of a good soldier than an evil queen, and much more physical: TV Marissa is almost as good at martial arts and weapons as Hanna.

We don't really get to see Hanna fully unleashed in all her lethal glory until the last two episodes, which are significantly better than everything that came before. It's a logical follow-up twist to the story that neatly sets up the second season, which looks to be far more interesting. Frankly, I wish the series creators hadn't bothered to rehash much of the film at all, and simply jumped right into the sequel material, delivering the backstory in a sprinkling of flashbacks. It would have avoided all the unflattering comparisons, and more cleanly set the series apart as its own beast. Assuming fans of the original film even made it through all eight episodes of season 1, will they come back to see how the story continues?

Hanna is currently streaming on Amazon Prime.

[embedded content]

Trailer for Amazon Prime's *Hannah*.

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