

'Baywatch' drowns with nary a laugh

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: « out of 4

Running Time: 118 min.

I'm not very familiar with the TV series upon which the new *Baywatch* feature is based, but one imagines that it provided viewers with a bit of tongue-in-cheek camp and escapism over the course of an hour. The sad thing is that during a screening of the new and updated version of this property, I actually spent much of the time feeling I might have been better served watching the original show. The new

Baywatch

mixes blunt, ill-timed gags with straight-forward action and does neither of the two particularly well. This effort sinks early on and completely drowns before anyone or anything can rescue it.

The plot revolves around heroic Mitch Buchannon (Dwayne Johnson) and his team of lifeguards (Ilfenesh Hadera and Kelly Rohrbach) taking on three new recruits. They include obnoxious, disgraced, ex-Olympian Matt Brody (Zac Efron), Summer (Alexandra Daddario) and an enthusiastic but less-than-statuesque Ronnie (Jon Bass). Together, they team up to rid the beaches of a new designer drug being distributed by resort owner, Victoria Leeds (Priyanka Chopra). As the lifeguards investigate, they discover a deeper (but not particularly interesting) conspiracy.

The problem with this movie isn't the cast or the concept itself. It's the script, which never finds the right tone or approach to the material and leaves the performers next to nothing to work with. The opening, in which Mitch saves a life and the title credit rises from the sea is an amusingly over-the-top moment, and there are perhaps two or three half-chuckles (one

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involving two men fighting in a child's room), but the writing never allows its characters to truly have fun with or satirize traditional hero roles.

Instead, the plot focuses on the bickering between Mitch and unwanted newcomer Matt. One gets the impression through early news clips that Matt is supposed to be dim. Unfortunately, as written he comes across as arrogant and obnoxious, but not always lunk-headed. It's only here and there where his lack of brains are displayed, too late for us to identify with him. And with the two irritated leads having to insult each other, even Mitch comes off as a bit haughty and self-important. Strangely enough, with an action star in the cast, the chases and fights play out in a straightforward manner that don't come across as exciting.

And as for the humor, it all falls flat. Many of the male characters lust after their female co-workers, which isn't exactly a hysterical jumping off point. Ronnie is so enamored with one of the ladies that at one point he can't stop, well, showing his excitement at being around the girl of his dreams. After falling on a deck chair, he finds his male parts wedged. Another sequence involves the characters breaking into a morgue to check a body. Upon learning that he has to look underneath the corpse's testicles, Matt displays disgust and contempt, almost getting the characters caught and harmed in the process. These are intended to be the movie's big comic moments and they're horrifically unfunny.

And of course, the female leads aren't given nearly enough to do. Even they look surprised at one point in the film when they are forced into taking physical action against a villain. These characters should have been far more integrated into the battles, but perhaps they didn't want to be saddled with some of the clunky one-liners Mitch has to deliver when taking out the bad guys, like, "Bath time, shithead."

There is some comic potential in a group of lifeguards taking it upon themselves to do their own criminal investigation, but it only results in a passing comment. So much entertainment could have resulted from the idea of a chiseled hero attempting his own police investigation and struggling with his lack of intelligence. Heck, even flipping stereotypes and making the characters extraordinarily verbose and witty and annoyed at not being respected for their smarts would have been something to build on.

Instead, everything about this bloated enterprise feels forgettable, forced and difficult to endure. The screenplay is terrible and no amount of charismatic personalities or characters onscreen can save it. *Baywatch* completely misses the mark and stands as one of the summer's lesser

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