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

Running Time: 143 minutes

Back in the ’90s, a movie featuring a comic villain parodying over-the-top action and spy movies requested, “...sharks with frickin’ laser beams attached to their heads.” I’m not entirely sure what this is a sign of, but it appears that some 20 years later, we have come full circle.

The new DC superhero movie *Aquaman* not only features the above seafaring threat, but also asks us to take it all seriously.

To be fair, the DC filmic universe has had its share of turkeys and this latest adventure is a modest improvement over several other features in the superhero franchise. There are some impressive action scenes as this grandly scaled epic trudges toward its climax. However, the screenplay is incredibly problematic, providing no real heart or tension to the central events. As a result, it ultimately feels like a lot of hogwash.

The movie introduces the origins of its title character with a hastily cut prologue featuring lighthouse keeper Thomas Curry (Temuera Morrison) falling in love with the Queen of Atlantis, the appropriately named Atlanna (Nicole Kidman). She’s forced to return to the undersea world, but not before giving birth to half-human, half-Atlantean Arthur (Jason Momoa). He becomes a reluctant superhero but finds himself called back to the sea when his power-mad half-brother King Orm (Patrick Wilson) makes a bid to become “Ocean Master” and start a war with the human world.

In order ascend to the throne and save both worlds, Arthur teams with telepathic warrior Mera (Amber Heard) and searches for an ancient trident that will convince others that he is the one true King (or Ocean Master, take your pick).

Momoa certainly has the physical chops and charisma for the role. He also displays good comic timing, effectively delivering a couple of funny lines even when the script leaves him hanging.

And there are a couple of effective action scenes. As the character is forced into the depths of the ocean, he comes face to face with a monstrous life-form known as The Trench. They’re well rendered as they swarm the hero and pursue him through the waters. Additionally, a physical confrontation in Sicily with a human foe called the Black Manta (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II) adds some visual kick to the proceedings.

At times, though, the fights look like something one might see in a computer game.

Still, the film’s biggest flaw is that whenever the characters are forced to open their mouths, their dialogue is wince-inducing.

Between action bits, the first half of the movie is exposition-heavy, with characters blankly describing important plot points. It almost feels like it’s all being told directly to the audience and is incredibly awkward sounding.

The action itself is also punctuated by less-than-subtle music stings that appear to unintentionally emphasize the silliness on display. There’s even an eye-rolling romantic montage later in the story. This is a less-than-subtle film.

Additionally, the written attempts at promoting positive themes are ineffective.

The villain’s first act of vengeance on humanity is to return our waste back from the seas onto land. It’s a good idea, but beyond a stilted conversion the subject is forgotten (as the characters soon visit a beautiful and very clean seaside town in the Mediterranean).

The other odd aspect is Aquaman’s less-than-conflicted view about killing foes. He lays waste to dozens over the course of the running time. At the finale, a speech is made about enacting change without taking lives, but after witnessing the hero eliminate so many rivals before sparing one life, it all rings hollow.

Momoa is a likable hero and one sees the potential for more entertaining future films starring the actor. Yet after so many attempts, DC still hasn’t quite found the formula to deliver an exciting superhero flick that equally emphases its characters and themes over elaborate imagery.

In the end, *Aquaman* has a few moments, but is mostly soggy.

Note: Those looking for extras will be treated to one segment after the first run of title cards end. After that, there’s no need to stay as nothing more occurs after the full credits.

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