Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 132 minutes

Another week, another comic book movie adaptation. This time out, it’s one of the less familiar superheroes, arriving as part of the latest DC line of features. *Shazam!* comes from the film universe that began in 2013, and includes titles like
Batman v Superman
and
Justice League
. This particular title takes a less somber and serious approach, emphasizing humor over tortured superhero souls. The end results aren’t perfect, and the flick takes a bit of time to find its rhythm. Still, it’s a far better and infinitely more entertaining film than any of the other DC features that have been released in the last six years.

As previous DC titles have displayed, nasty forces are on the rise. A once great and now aging Wizard (Djimon Hounsou), sends out a signal to find the most noble and pure of heart to take his mantle in the fight against evil. Unfortunately, no one on the planet qualifies for the position. When the sinister Dr. Thaddeus Sivana (Mark Strong) manifests the spirits and powers of the seven deadly sins, the City of Philadelphia comes under threat. With no one else on the roster, the Wizard gives troubled foster teen Billy Batson (Asher Angel) incredible abilities. The boy becomes an idealized version of himself, taking on the form of adult superhero, Shazam (Zachary Levi). Billy looks to roommate and comic book aficionado Freddy (Jack Dylan Grazer)

for help in determining what to do next.

There are some awkward bits early on as the movie attempts to push through the introductions and story exposition. In the first half-hour, it’s mainly up to the kids to deliver jokes. They manage to pull some of them off, but a few of them are a bit clumsy as written, and not all of them work. Like in other DC flicks, occasionally the jokes are based around violent actions, and as a result these moments don’t always come off as particularly funny. Still, the goofier tone in general helps the blunter attempts at levity come across as less maladjusted and just as simple misfires in a feature full of humor.

The movie really picks up with the introduction of Levi as Shazam. He’s very entertaining in the role of superhero, perfectly emulating a 14-year-old trapped in an adult’s body. Most of the advertising for the film revolves around the training in the middle of the movie, and these moments are the story’s most effective bits. The fact that this story’s hero is essentially a boy is also a great asset to the feature. This is not a perfect individual who seems flawless and unstoppable. Instead, he’s an imperfect character whose powers are out of his control and difficult to manage. Billy doesn’t have the maturity to process and deal with what is happening, which means the premise itself has the potential for more drama and humor.

Gags arrive rapidly after the intro to *Shazam*, and it results in plenty of scenes with a comedic bent that do work effectively. This includes the newly minted superhero’s excitement at being given the “powers” of purchasing beer at a local convenience store without reprisal. While attempting to foil a robbery and unexpectedly learning that his body or suit can repel bullets, the excited and eager teen asks to be shot in the face by the armed criminals. And late in the film, there’s an extremely funny gag that revolves around the villain’s lengthy and impassioned “bad guy speech” that doesn’t come across as intended.

Ultimately, the characters and story are sweet and the action is fast and entertaining. While some of the humor doesn’t quite hit the mark, a lot more of it does land, thanks to Levi’s work as the central superhero. And the uniqueness of the *Shazam!* concept, allows for a bit of drama, while still not taking itself too seriously. This makes the movie a heck of lot more fun than other DC entries, and will please most comic book fans young and old. Finally, for those interested, there are two extra bits at the end of the film; one scene that sets up another (somewhat obscure) villain for a future installment, and a post-credits gag.

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