

‘Uncharted’ – a lesser clone of ‘Indiana Jones,’ but still fun

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

out of «««««

Running Time: 128 minutes

This film from Sony Pictures opens exclusively in cinemas on Feb. 18.

These days, it seems like Hollywood is almost exclusively in the business of creating franchises. At least, that is the feeling of this reviewer after seeing a Marvel or DC logo pop up at the beginning of so many features.

“Uncharted” marks the debut title from PlayStation Productions, Sony’s attempt to develop movie lines inspired by their video game properties. This title strains on occasion to make an impression with game content that is already borrowing from adventure film franchises. It feels like a lesser clone of “Indiana Jones” (or, to some extent, even the “National Treasure” films), but the movie still manages to provide a few moments of breezy fun and exaggerated action.

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Nathan Drake (Tom Holland) is a young man who was raised at an orphanage and separated from his sibling. Left to survive on his own, he becomes something of a history expert, puzzle-solver and expert thief.

After taking a job as a bartender, Drake is approached by Victor “Sully” Sullivan (Mark Wahlberg), a man who claims to have been a friend of the lead’s long-lost brother. Wanting to know more, our hero teams up with this figure. He helps his new mentor on a mission to obtain antiques that will lead to the location of billions in gold hidden by the crew of 16th century explorer Ferdinand Magellan.

Drake and Sully form an uneasy partnership with treasure seeker Chloe Frazer (Sophia Ali) and race to the loot against the sinister Santiago Moncada (Antonio Banderas) and his hired gun, Jo Braddock (Tati Gabrielle). They pursue each other through Spain and the Philippines to accomplish their goal.

Tom Holland is an unusual choice as adventurer Nathan Drake. His sweet, nice-guy persona from the “Spider-Man” series is still very evident in this film, despite his character having a darker history and unresolved issues with family members.

But instead of dwelling on that, the story is more interested in comedy. Specifically, Drake’s bickering with mentor Sully. There are a series of running gags between the two that fall flat, but every so often a verbal jab does hit the bullseye.

One gag involving a headset as one character summarizes their relationship does generate a laugh.

And with the exception of protagonist Drake, just about every person in the film is willing to turn on one another at the drop of a hat. The selfishness on display does add some humor and zing to the proceedings.

Of course, in treasure hunt movies viewers must regularly suspend disbelief as the characters take on impossible challenges. The screenplay of this feature takes it to extremes.

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It sends the heroes through a series of tunnels and traps only feet below the streets of downtown Barcelona (as well as a Papa John’s pizzeria, which is as blatant and bizarre a product placement tie-in as you are likely to see at the movies).

Indeed, some European cities were built upon the ruins of earlier remnants, but this movie pushes the concept to its limits. The fight scenes are well edited and the outrageous climax involving boats and choppers is certainly unique, providing amusement because of just how over-the-top it is. Alas, this silliness also lessens some of the tension and thrills, since none of it seems remotely plausible.

In the end, this flick is incredibly ungainly. The cast are likable, yet the humor is hit-and-miss. The action set pieces are elaborate, but not always thrilling. And the story spends a lot of time doling out background info and conflicts between characters that are never resolved (all involved are clearly hoping to advance a larger story arc and there is even an extra scene after the first set of credits setting the next adventure up).

It’s odd and all over the place, but at least it isn’t dull. As such, “Uncharted” may provide a few chuckles for enthusiasts of the video game or forgiving viewers looking for a silly, globe-trotting action flick.

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