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

out of ««««

Running Time: 125 minutes

This feature from Marvel Studios and Walt Disney Pictures is opening at theaters nationwide on Feb. 17.

It has been a few years since Marvel fans have seen the Ant-Man character appear on the big screen (specifically, *Avengers: Endgame* in 2019). These films have always tried to inject as much humor as thrills, often to varying effect.

Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania is even more bold in its efforts to mix genres. It further expands the Marvel comic book universe by adding a major and stone-faced villain into the proceedings. There are a few amusing gags and some enjoyable action toward the close, but the attempts to throw in heavier drama between laughs results in a tonally unbalanced film.

The film opens up with an entertaining catch-up with Scott Lang/Ant-Man (Paul Rudd). After helping save the world, Scott has rested on his laurels and appears to be enjoying fame. But after learning that his teenage daughter Cassie (Kathryn Newton) has been following in his old footsteps and getting into trouble with the law, he expresses concern.

Scott is even more surprised to discover that his offspring has been working with Hope Van Dyne/The Wasp (Evangeline Lilly) and Dr. Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) on experiments related to the Quantum Realm. This is a mysterious alternate dimension where Hank Pym’s wife Janet Van Dyne (Michelle Pfeiffer) was lost for decades. When a family meeting results in the entire group being transported to this strange land, they must deal with unexpected foes like M.O.D.O.K. (Corey Stoll) and the intimidating Kang The Conqueror (Jonathan Majors).

The pacing is fast, with the protagonists being sent quickly to an alternate reality. Like other recent titles from Marvel, there is a great deal of discussion detailing the concept of multiverses.

The Quantum Realm offers filmmakers the opportunity to see environments different from Earth and filled with an array of unique individuals. There are a couple of original sights (including organic, living structures), but most of the backdrops seem inspired by *Star Wars* films rather than anything new. Additionally, the constant barrage of digital visual effects isn’t always convincing – at times it does look like a group of actors standing in front of a green screen.

At least the cast are charismatic and do their best to sell the fantasy. The heroes are likable and some off-the-cuff remarks earn chuckles. This includes Hank Pym’s apt comment on the appearance of an individual at a bar, as well as several of Scott’s observations about his surreal situation.

And there are a couple of great cameos. One familiar face appears in a single scene and makes an impression hinting at his own exploits with Janet, tormenting Hank in the process. The other, more obscure reference is an early blink-and-you’ll-miss-it appearance by the frontman of rock band Eels, whose physicist father Hugh Everett III first proposed the many-worlds concept. The latter is a very nice nod and one that many will miss.

But not all of the humor works and many scenes veer from serious and somber to downright silly. Kang The Conqueror is a powerful and threatening villain, but his henchman M.O.D.O.K. is

played strictly for laughs. His appearance is so bizarre that it is distracting. His attempts at humor don’t work and feel very jarring.

The movie also introduces some new faces from the Quantum Realm, but they aren’t given an opportunity to make an impression. Of course, with seven central heroes and villains already present, it’s a tall order for anyone else to stand out.

The action is also hit-and-miss. Some fights involving close-contact are hard to follow, but the climax does manage to deliver a few impressive jabs. That’s a good thing, especially given that Kang is set up as such a formidable opponent (possessing psychic visions of the future), it seems strange when simple tactics effectively throw him off.

Of course, by the end it all leads to a realization that a large part of this film is simply about setting up a major storyline for the current phase of films and beyond (the sequences during and after the credits are only interested in further emphasizing this villain).

Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania is a busy film and a mixed bag of positives and negatives. Some of the humor works, while other bits seem completely out of place when events turn serious. The multiverse aspect offers exciting new possibilities, but is equally fatiguing.

Even with the potential of all space and time being threatened, if there are thousands upon thousands of versions of the same heroes and villains, the struggle doesn’t feel quite as urgent, nor the danger as imminent. Perhaps as this phase progresses it’ll all come together dynamically but for now, like many recent Marvel efforts, it frustrates as much as it entertains.

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