

'Madame Web' fails to ensnare viewers

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «

out of «««««

Running Time: 116 minutes

This film from Sony Pictures is currently playing in cinemas.

It may be due to oversaturation and a string of less-than-thrilling adventures, but superhero tales have been struggling recently. There has been an exception or two, but for the most part critics and audiences have begun turning up their noses at some of these titles. *Madame Web* introduces a new character existing in the city home to Spider-Man. Despite the concept's potential, the film doesn't land successfully and sadly marks a new low in the Marvel Universe.

The story begins in 1975 with a very pregnant explorer named Constance (Kerry Bishé), who is searching for a mythic spider in South America that is believed to grant incredible abilities to those whom it bites. After discovering the arachnid, her guide Ezekiel Sims (Tahar Rahim) mortally wounds her and takes the creature while Constance goes into labor. Many years later we are introduced to Cassandra Webb (Dakota Johnson), a lonely paramedic who grew up without a mother, lacks social graces and can't relate to anyone she helps on the job.

After a near tragic accident, she begins having clairvoyant visions of upcoming events. When

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she has a vision of Ezekiel pursuing and murdering three teenage girls in a subway car, the protagonist can't help but step in and try to alter the future. She helps teens Sulia Cornwall (Sydney Sweeney), Anya Corazon (Isabela Merced) and Mattie Franklin (Celeste O'Connor) escape his clutches and the three go on the run.

There are immediate issues with the movie that are the result of the screenplay. There are plenty of attempts to build a relationship between the paramedic and best friend/coworker Ben Parker (Adam Scott) early on. While the two do add a moment of levity here and there, the verbal interplay between them isn't as sharp as hoped for and Ben largely disappears from the story until the climax.

And when Cassandra and the teens begin being hunted down by the relentless villain with spider-like abilities who can climb walls, they react in a surprisingly understated manner. In general, the dialogue is clunky and there are plenty of groan-worthy comments as the group attempt to stand tall and face off against the enemy.

One bit that struck this reviewer as odd is the means of escape used by the protagonists. They steal a taxi and get chased out of New York City with the news reporting that Cassandra has actually kidnapped the three youths. Despite having some bashes and a less-than-stealthy appearance, the supposedly terrified leads continue to use this vehicle as their primary mode of transport. It goes in and out of New York, gets parked in plain sight at a local inn, presumably gets taken to the airport and then parked for some days, yet draws the attention of literally no one.

Another unintentionally humorous moment involves Cassandra repeatedly telling the teens that she will always be there for them, only to leave them at various intervals while searching for clues about her own past.

And the action set pieces don't feel particularly exciting. While the idea of a character having terrifying visions is initially intriguing, it ultimately starts to become routine, with the lead seeing a potential issue and then choosing an appropriate action to avoid it from occurring. There also seems to be a lot of automatic dialogue replacement and strange sound quality in regards to a character or two.

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A couple of these issues on their own could be overlooked, but after several of these events occur, it all feels more and more preposterous. Perhaps all of this just goes to show that the script itself isn't engaging and that the movie's story oddities ultimately become distracting.

In the end, *Madame Web* fails to ensnare viewers and doesn't add much to the Marvel Universe (for those hoping the tale might promise a reveal for the future, there are no credit or post-credit scenes). Even superhero movie enthusiasts shouldn't feel compelled to rush out and see this effort on the big screen.

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