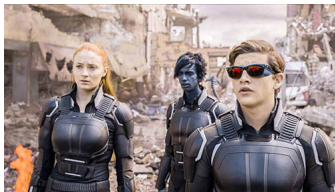


‘X-Men: Apocalypse’ – A flawed flick, but avoids total disaster

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 27 May 2016 02:31



Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 147 min.

Another week, another comic-book-related beat-down between famous superheroes. This week it's *X-Men: Apocalypse*, the sixth title in the popular *Marvel* series and the third of more recent slate of films featuring younger versions of the characters. This tale is set in the '80s and depicts perhaps the most dangerous adversary the mutants have encountered. So, does it keep the prequel winning-streak alive?

Well, it certainly isn't as strong as the two previous chapters, which took unique approaches to the comic-book material that included time-travel and an exploration of the complex relationship between two characters who would eventually become adversaries. By comparison, this follow-up is a rather standard and straight-forward effort, featuring a nasty antagonist bent on nothing more than world destruction and domination.

A prologue in ancient Egypt introduces Apocalypse (Oscar Isaac), the world's first and most powerful mutant. This villain is a megalomaniacal type who can transfer his consciousness into other living beings and gain their powers, giving him unending life and ever-growing abilities. After centuries in suspended animation, the mutant is reawakened in the 1980's and violently makes his presence felt.

Power mad, Apocalypse decides that the modern world is filled with false Gods — he seeks to destroy it all, take control and rebuild as the planet's true deity. He ensnares the assistance of Magneto (Michael Fassbender), Psylocke (Olivia Munn), Angel (Ben Hardy), and Storm

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(Alexandra Shipp) to do so. This leaves Professor X (James McAvoy), young mutants like Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence), Beast (Nicholas Hoult), Nightcrawler (Kodi Smit-McPhee), and Quicksilver (Evan Peters) tasked with saving the world.

Those referenced above are only the tip of the iceberg and there are far more characters, mutants, and subplots that enter the fray. As expected, even some series vets pop up for a scene or two to loosely tie all of the movies together. Each one has issues and troubled pasts (sometimes with each other) that are introduced or elaborated on, adding to a lengthy narrative. There are probably about 15 or 16 central roles. It's excessive even by the overfilled standards we're now used to seeing in these superhero adaptations.

At least time is taken with each role to develop the mutants, even if it results in an extended running time. Of course, some elements work better than others. There is a blooming romance and a few moments of inner torment that we've seen many times before with these characters. Their personal drama is so familiar (most viewers will have seen variations of this five times before) that it doesn't have the impact it should.

However, two of the more eccentric characters do engage and ultimately steal the show — Quicksilver and Nightcrawler. They both have very different but likable personalities, more unusual personal issues and fascinating, visually dynamic powers. Again, a mansion-set slow-motion sequence featuring the former may be the highlight of the movie.

And Isaac as Apocalypse does the best he can in a difficult part, caked in make-up, written in a muted manner and generally lacking in bad-guy charisma. At least he doesn't succumb to histrionics. He's an intimidating adversary who wipes people out without a second thought and leaves them half-encased in walls or the ground. Additionally, there are some fun neon-tinged visuals that hark back to the '80s. Most importantly, the action itself is clear and easy to follow.

In the end, *X-Men: Apocalypse* is a middle-of-the-road effort in the series and suffers from too many characters and subplots. Still, I think some of the press surrounding the movie has been a bit harsh. For all its faults, it is a well-made and reasonably entertaining superhero flick. With the behemoth Marvel Universe now in full swing, these characters may be starting to look out of fashion, but their adventures should still please casual moviegoers.

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