

'Suicide Squad' works in fits and starts, but still doesn't hit its target

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 123 min.

Another week, another comic-book movie. At least, that's the way it seems lately. The most recent tale to get the big cinematic treatment is from the DC universe, and at least it features a more unusual hook than many other superhero tales. Personally, I had a lot of trouble with the dour and nonsensical *Superman* movies. So is *Suicide Squad* an improvement on what has come before? The answer is, well, sort of... in fits and starts.

The covert group is created by U.S. government agent Amanda Waller (Viola Davis) as a means to take on underhanded and impossible secret missions, while maintaining plausible deniability for the group's actions. Led on the ground by Rick Flag (Joel Kinnaman), members include The Enchantress (Cara Delevingne), Deadshot (Will Smith), Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie), Boomerang (Jai Courtney), Diablo (Jay Hernandez), The Croc (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje), and Slipknot (Adam Beach). Also involved is the sword-wielding Katana (Karen Fukuhara), as well as brief appearances by The Joker (Jared Leto) and Batman (Ben Affleck).

After something goes wrong from within and a supernatural force threatens the city, the team is dispatched on their first mission.

While sequences are clouded in rain and darkness, some portions of the movie have a bright, neon-tinged aesthetic that is appealing to look at. There are also a couple of nifty camera tricks, including a subtly effective character transformation that is visually clever and accomplished.

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As for the banter, a couple of insults here and there are effective, including some bickering between Deadshot and his captors/bosses. Harley Quinn also manages to sell a few quirky comments. Still, more of the attempts at humor miss the mark than hit it — several feel forced in and choppy edited. There are loads of one-liners that somehow don’t result in the big laughs intended.

Like many other superhero films of recent years, a lot of the flat jokes may have to do with the fact that there are an unreasonable number of underdeveloped characters on display. In fact, there are so many involved, it takes a good half-hour just for Waller to introduce the crooks.

As events progress, many members of the team begin to fade into the background. Slipknot, Katana, Boomerang, and The Croc are the obvious characters that aren’t utilized; the filmmakers would have been wiser to cut them out entirely and spend the lost time fleshing out the leads more thoroughly.

At least Flag and Enchantress are given enough time to make an impression, and Deadshot and Harley Quinn are the teammates who are by far the most developed (we get lengthy back stories on these villains). While definitely limited by comparison, Diablo also gets a moment or two to stand out. However, all the others are little more than window dressing.

And even though she gets more time onscreen, Enchantress still feels like a missed opportunity. She’s the most interesting character at the outset, with dual personalities fighting over the same body. This aspect, as well as her prior relationship with Flag, adds some complications and an extra dimension to the conflict. The pair is interesting, but they are soon separated.

When the operation begins, the squad ends up in the streets mowing down foes; even worse, these are *literally* faceless opponents. The confrontations don’t result in much drama and lack the kick they should possess.

It’s funny, the movie feels overcrowded and yet not enough is happening on a story level. The tale is almost laid out like a simple video game; it begins with the group being introduced,

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progressing through the city and taking out nondescript villains, before facing off against a big boss at the climax. There’s something slightly underwhelming about the entire enterprise. Perhaps it’s even the mission itself. When all is revealed with a story twist, it may result in more disappointment and questions about the film’s logic than actual surprise.

To be fair, *Suicide Squad* provides a few individual moments of quality. Bits and pieces work, and it’s definitely an improvement over *Batman v Superman*. However, it is also clear that the DC Universe still hasn’t found its cinematic sweet spot. There are more titles on the way, so fans will have to continue holding out hope that this work-in-progress filmic series improves with each subsequent title.

And yep, there’s an extra scene after the initial run of credits. It isn’t all that gripping and alludes to something that comic fans will already know is coming, but it’s there for those who may be interested. There’s nothing at the very end of the feature, so you’re free to take off after the first bonus scene.

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