

Quirky ‘Submarine’ Balances Wit With Emotion in Clever Way

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 10, 2011 - 12:08pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Richard Ayoade's debut comedy “Submarine” has such an incredibly strong first half that it almost makes the relative disappointment of the second half even more disappointing by comparison. A super-smart ending saves the piece from going out on the wrong note completely and the overall piece bodes well for whatever this talented director does next. Whatever flaws the film may have, it's certainly unlike anything else in theaters right now and yet will likely remind certain viewers of beloved films like “The Graduate,” “Harold and Maude,” and “Rushmore.”

Based on the coming-of-age novel by Joe Dunthorne, “Submarine” centers on the crisis of cynicism vs. sentimentality that often faces us at a formative age. One minute it's not “cool” to be in love, the next you're writing poetry. One minute, you're aware that being a bully is a bad thing, the next minute you're doing it to make a pretty girl like you. Male adolescence is a series of contradictions and discoveries and the best of “Submarine” offers a unique perspective on those crazy days.



Submarine

Photo credit: Fox Searchlight

Our hero through this tumultuous time is Oliver Tate (Craig Roberts), a bizarre young man who seems concerned about everything but is at that age where concern isn't cool. He's noticed that his parents (Sally Hawkins & Noah Taylor) haven't had sex in some time (through detective work involving the dimmer switch in their bedroom) and isn't quite sure about the New Age douche (Paddy Considine) who just moved in down the street. More importantly, he's begun a relationship with the wicked-smart and possibly-just-wicked Jordana (a great

Yasmin Paige) and he’s having trouble keeping it all together.

Holding hands, staring into the horizon, and lighting things on fire (Jordana is kind of a pyro) is easy enough but life gets really complicated when it seems like the marriage of Oliver’s parents might fall apart at the same time that Jordana’s mother might die of cancer. How do you handle adolescence when other issues weigh down on you? Without a hint of sentimentality, “Submarine” actually deals with some pretty intense subject matter, including potential divorce and death.

The first half of this heavily-narrated film is incredibly clever, smart, and engaging. With his often-blank stare and always-buttoned coat, Oliver practically looks trapped in his hormone-fueled suburban nightmare. His attempts to woo Jordana with boxed wine and bad poetry is spectacular, but even cleverer is the way the attempted seduction plays out. It is incredibly difficult to make a film this quirky still feel genuine but Ayoade and his very talented cast (it’s saying something that two newbies like Roberts and Paige are the memorable ones in a film with Hawkins, Taylor, and Considine) keep it humming.



Submarine

Photo credit: Fox Searchlight

The second half of “Submarine,” in which Oliver Tate has to make some pretty tough decisions (and makes some wrong ones) isn’t nearly as strong. I started to dislike Oliver and not in a “movie way,” but in ways that made me not root for him as strongly as comparable characters in the movies that clearly inspired the film. It’s not that he’s an anti-hero, but he does something particular that kind of makes him a jerk, and some of his behavior in the second half didn’t quite feel right. Of course, we all do dumb things when we’re teenagers but that light touch of the first half is much more successful than the heavy one of the second.

Still, there’s enough done well throughout (including EXCELLENT use of new tunes by Alex Turner of The Arctic Monkeys, including two that we hear in their entirety) to recommend the piece and the ending is simply stellar. “Submarine” may not be a perfect film but it’s the kind of debut that could convince you that its director has one in him.

“Submarine” stars Craig Roberts, Yasmin Paige, Sally Hawkins, Noah Taylor, and Paddy Considine. It was written and directed by Richard Ayoade and opens on June 10th, 2011 in Chicago.



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