

Daring Vision of Darren Aronofsky's Epic 'Noah'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 27, 2014 - 12:55pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

Darren Aronofsky's controversial "Noah" exists somewhere between the sentimental, straight-faced versions of biblical tales that Hollywood has been producing for decades and more auteur-driven fare like Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ". The result is often the best of both worlds, a film that feels remarkably ambitious and definably of a fabric with the themes this director has explored before, but also stunningly emotional and adherent to the lessons of sacrifice intended by the original authors of this tale. Far more than just the two-by-two animal story that most of us learned in school, "Noah" not only has something to say about a search for meaning in the modern world but is vibrant, powerful filmmaking at the same time.

From the very beginning, a discerning viewer knows this is not your standard biblical epic. The tone, the scope, the very design of the massive, stone-covered fallen angels now known as Watchers—this feels closer to a modern fantasy tale like "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers" than "Son of God". Noah (Russell Crowe), one of the struggling survivors of Seth in a world dominated by the sinful descendants of Cain, has been having visions. A raindrop turns barren soil into a flower. A dream features thousands of men and animals floating underwater. The end times are clearly near and Noah travels with his family, including wife Naameh (Jennifer Connelly) and three boys, to visit Methuselah (Anthony Hopkins) and gain some guidance.



Noah

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

The two conclude that Noah has been presented these visions by the Creator for a reason. He must save the still-innocent animals of the world, two at a time to maintain their species, but allow the humanity who has turned their eye from the Creator to perish. With the help of the Watchers (voiced by Nick Nolte, Mark Margolis, and others), Noah spends many years building a massive ark. His children grow and develop

personalities of their own. Shem (Douglas Booth) is in love with Ila (Emma Watson), a girl who has basically become a part of their family after her discovery on that initial journey to Methuseleh. When Noah reveals the plan to repopulate society, Ila faces a crisis for she was wounded to the point that she can't have children. And other sons Ham (Logan Lerman) and Japheth (Leo McHugh Carroll) have no women to bring on the journey either. Noah's family could be the end of the line for mankind. And when the King Tubal-cain (Ray Winstone) realizes that Noah's ark could be the lone refuge against the spite of the Creator, he takes action.

Without washing the production in the kind of church-based self-importance that often sinks films like it, Aronofsky nonetheless treats his subject matter as truth. This is a film that fits snugly in his filmography as a director long-fascinated with people searching for meaning through physical and spiritual challenge. Whether it is Ellen Burstyn seeking that which all addicts believe hides under the surface in "Requiem For a Dream", Hugh Jackman searching for immortality in "The Fountain", or Natalie Portman turning physical challenge into insanity in "Black Swan," Aronofsky tells incredibly complex narratives that somehow still find a way to hinge on what lies within humanity. In that sense, he's perfect for a biblical film. And his vision of Noah as a man plagued by visions that he knows will lead to the eradication of the human race is a daring, challenging one. One need not bring a single piece of religious baggage to "Noah" to appreciate the film thematically as an examination of sacrifice and steadfast belief in doing what's right.



Noah

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

Aronofsky is greatly enabled in his storytelling by not just a rock-solid cast but his typical array of technical experts. As he did with Aronofsky on "Black Swan" and "The Fountain", cinematographer Matthew Libatique creates a visual language that both fits the story but feels unexpected at the same time. Aronofsky keeps going back to repeated images of how "man got here"—a snake, an apple, Cain killing Abel. And Libatique beautifully captures the merging of the natural and fantasy worlds in "Noah". Both men are assisted by another stellar score from Clint Mansell, an emotionally powerful series of compositions that call back to "Requiem For a Dream" and "The Fountain", two of the best scores of the '00s.

Other than the auteur's pitch-perfect blend of fantasy and humanity, what will stand out for most audiences on viewing "Noah" is the reminder that Russell Crowe can truly deliver when given the right material. This is easily his best performance since at least "American Gangster" and I would go back further to "Cinderella Man". He's both confident and yet vulnerable at the same time. He's matched in intensity by Connelly. Only Lerman seems a bit miscast at times, especially as the film narratively spins a bit in the middle act.

"Noah" was reportedly taken away from Darren Aronofsky and what's being released isn't 100% his cut. And yet it's crystal clear that a large portion of what he intended remains. There's a dark, violent, terrifying edge to much of this film. Take for example the scene in which Noah goes to find his sons wives and sees mankind at its brutal worst, selling children and ripping animals apart. Aronofsky and his team have created a film that's majestic in its excess—great sin, great flood, great animals, great scope, great sacrifice. It's a great film.

"Noah" stars Russell Crowe, Jennifer Connelly, Anthony Hopkins, Ray Winstone, Emma Watson, Douglas Booth, and Logan Lerman. It was directed by Darren Aronofsky and opens on March 28, 2014.

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [14]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [13]



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