

‘A’ for Effort, ‘C’ for Execution in Dwayne Johnson’s Unmemorable ‘Hercules’

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on July 26, 2014 - 7:01pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – I empathize with Dwayne Johnson and simultaneously don’t. Most people never get rich and famous once let alone twice. Sure, it’s hard to rebrand people from the wrestling superstar you once were into the dramatic action star you’re trying to become, but your past is forever immortal.

Like Jackie Chan wants to be [viewed as a dramatic actor](#) [20] instead of a funny karate man, so too does Dwayne Johnson want to drop his wrestling image as The Rock and be taken seriously as a real actor. The problem is he’s all over the place. It’s hard to be Hercules when you’re being remembered as campy in films like “Journey 2: The Mysterious Island” and the upcoming “Journey 3: From the Earth to the Moon”.



Dwayne Johnson is Hercules in “Hercules”.

Photo credit: Kerry Brown, Paramount Pictures

This isn’t having actor’s range. Having real range is Charlize Theron successfully branching out with a challenging role in “Monster.” Instead, this is trying to be an actor when you’re really someone else and having an identity crisis in the meantime. This is throwing darts at a moving dartboard and seeing what will stick rather than having a clear vision and honing it.

Dwayne Johnson has his moments as a real actor, but too often he tries too hard to convince you he’s someone he’s not. Even before analyzing Dwayne Johnson’s performance as Hercules, the film struggles to gain widespread understanding to moviegoers about why it’s here in the first place.

Only 6 months earlier, “The Legend of Hercules” with Kellan Lutz (“Twilight”) [bombed fantastically](#) [21] at the box office beginning on Jan. 10, 2014. The \$70 million film only earned \$19 million domestically and \$42 million overseas. It was perhaps the worst-reviewed “blockbuster” film in recent memory and certainly in 2014.



Ingrid Bolsø Berdal is Atalanta in “Hercules”.

Photo credit: Kerry Brown, Paramount Pictures

In January, I wrote this about it:

Despite taking fight sequence and cinematographic inspiration from films like “300” and “Gladiator,” “The Legend of Hercules” fails as an epic action film because of its low-cost acting, a stiff and cheesy script, an underwhelming visual feast and pre-pubescent character depth. It’s a summer blockbuster film wannabe that opened in January instead to recoup the piece of its \$70 million budget that it can.

Six months later, the new “Hercules” is already proving to be an improvement, but it’s still not where it should be and we deserve better from Hollywood. Hercules is such a titanic character that I don’t even care which part of his story the film decides to tell. With Kellan Lutz, the film centered on his origins, betrayal, exile, sale into slavery, forbidden love and finally his glorious triumph.

Dwayne Johnson, on the other hand, is a mercenary for hire who fights on the wrong side and then tries to redirect his misplaced allegiance. Rather than a Romeo and Juliet love story of forbidden love, he has no lady to pine after and this element of the traditional Hollywood formula is missing.



Dwayne Johnson is Hercules in “Hercules”.

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

He’s got a fighting lady (Ingrid Bolsø Berdal as Atalanta) in his gaggle of mercenaries, but they’re like family. He also has Aksel Hennie as Tydeus in his group, and though he says nothing at all, his loyalty and violence make him the most interesting and memorable character in the whole film. Instead of blending typical aggression with a sex interest, Hercules attempts to win your heart through his anguish over losing his wife and children. A naked flashback to her (Irina Shayk as Megara) is completely unnecessary and gratuitous.

This backstory was a pivotal attempt at an emotional arc that in-authentically builds slowly and climaxes with “B”-list believability. There’s actually a line in the film that accidentally makes fun of Hercules’ woe for his murdered family. The character says something like “We’ve all lost people,” which makes Hercules’ loss feel small even though you’re supposed to feel great empathy for him.

The attempt at an emotional story is the film’s central failure. The only thing you end up feeling is what a zombie must feel. All you’re able to care about is the visual spectacle while being devoid of a reason for caring. The second the film cleanly wraps up with nowhere else to go, you move about your life and needn’t look back, talk further or question anything.



Irina Shayk is Megara in “Hercules”.

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

Perhaps all you might question later is what his bushy beard is made from. Then you’d have your first laugh of the movie – after the movie – once learning that it came from yak testicle hair.

A good film entertains, but a great film makes you think and question. “Hercules” goes through Hollywood’s typical motions without daring to rise above. It feels like the script itself is afraid of giving too much dialogue to Johnson because it’d rather keep you busy on his bulging body while taking attention away from his acting. He’s got potential and in a few scenes you can feel that he’s actually feeling what he’s supposed to be.

But for the most part, you can visibly see that he’s acting. And for 98 short minutes, you can’t travel back in time to believe this wrestling superstar is actually the Greek myth he sets out to be.

“Hercules” stars Dwayne Johnson, Ian McShane, John Hurt, Rufus Sewell, Aksel Hennie, Ingrid Bolsø Berdal, Reece Ritchie, Joseph Fiennes, Tobias Santelmann, Peter Mullan and Rebecca Ferguson from director Brett Ratner and writers Ryan Condal and Evan Spiliotopoulos. It is 98 minutes and rated “PG-13” for epic battle sequences, violence, suggestive comments, brief strong language and partial nudity. The film opened on July 25, 2014.



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