

Anti-Heroism of 'Deadpool' Revels in Sass & Violence

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It was inevitable that we would get an “R-rated” superhero movie, and “Deadpool” fits the bill with its swears, violence and a little sex/nudity. It also has Ryan Reynolds as that hero, doing his “Van Wilder” smarmy act to the nth degree. How that all works will determine how you like the film.

There are several dead spots in “Deadpool,” including a prolonged sequence that might fit in with the torture porn of the “Saw” movies. But the Marvel Studios film – based on a hero created in 1991 – contains a lot of wise guy humor, the breaking of the “fourth wall” to talk directly to the audience and general anarchy, as it makes fun of the whole superhero genre. It also has a manic energy, and if the special effects were taken out, it might have passed as a 1980s/early ‘90s punk independent film about down-and-out freaks trying to be superheroes. There are many levels to explore in this film, which includes the general acceptance or rejection of the premise.

Wade (Ryan Reynolds) is a small-time hood trying to go straight, and falls in love with exotic dancer Vanessa (Morena Baccarin) during that transition. He also finds out he has inoperable cancer, so chooses to leave his relationship to die alone. While stewing in his sorrow, a mysterious man has been profiling him, and offers him a cure through a mad scientist named Ajax (Ed Skrein) and his experimental drug therapy. The process is torture porn, but in the end Wade’s body becomes self healing, and Deadpool is born.



Ryan Reynolds as a Different Kind of Hero in 'Deadpool'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

The newly minted “hero” has two goals – to find Ajax to get revenge for the torture of the treatment and a debilitating after effect, and to find Vanessa. Along the way he hooks up with bartender Weasel (T.J. Miller), and a couple of X-Men – the ones budgeted for the film, as the joke goes – metal man Colossus (voice of Stefan Kapicic) and “Negasonic Teenage Warhead” (Brianna Hildebrand).

The character of Deadpool is a recent addition to the Marvel Universe, premiering in 1991 (I guess if 25 years ago was “recent”). He evolved from being a villain initially to becoming an “anti-hero.” His nickname is the “Merc with the Mouth,” since he is a mercenary by trade. Ryan Reynolds is a perfect choice for this bizarre incarnation, and joins the very small club (he and Ben Affleck) that have portrayed both DC Comic and Marvel Universe heroes – in the film, Reynolds even makes fun of his former Green Lantern persona.

The film has true moments of hilarity, which is its strength. In the midst of all the big special effects and over-violent fight sequences, there is the wise-cracking Ryan Reynolds “character.” He always has fun with it, and it hurts no one, but there is a warning – Reynolds is about as overindulgent as he has ever been. I can see that this “RR experience” could easily be too much, and he piles it on in this film. It didn’t bug me, but...caveat emptor.

The best gags involve the navel gazing of being in a superhero movie, while at the same time commenting on being in a superhero movie. The credit roll in the title sequence starts it all off (“British Villain”), and establishes the laughs. I love a film that gets me in the mood early, and the bang in the beginning is preparation for everything to follow. That strategy of that set up was genius, much like Marvel Studios did with “Guardians of the Galaxy.”



Teenage Angst, an Anti-Hero and a Metal Man in 'Deadpool'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

To justify the “R” rating, there was a long and ultimately pointless sequence of torture, while Deadpool was getting his healing powers. It never seemed to end, and brought the film to a noticeable halt. It was Reynolds that immediately saved all that, going into the early days of his powers in a freaky montage. This is all part of a vision that becomes a new wave stab at the superhero genre, which in its self importance and overabundance, is due for a metaphoric ass kicking.

Which film will rule the dating world this Valentine’s Day weekend? Well, if the relationship is six months or less, go with “Zoolander 2” (safe, funny). If in the white hot six months to a year, maybe “The Choice” (pretty people romance). One year or longer, make it “Deadpool.” And you can make it a fun kind of game – check out the movie lines to determine which couple is which.

“Deadpool” is in theaters everywhere. Featuring Ryan Reynolds, T.J. Miller, Morena Baccarin, Stefan Kapicic, Brianna Hildebrand and Ed Skrein. Screenplay by Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick. Directed by Tim Miller. Rated “R”



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