

## ‘The Magnificent Seven’ is How the Western Was Lost

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 23, 2016 - 6:16pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The appeal of Westerns was mostly lost on me when I was younger. The tales of these hypermasculine wanderers, answering every problem with a gun, never appealed to me. When I got older, I discovered their messages of honor and self-defense against corruption. The genre proved it could be more than one-liners and shootouts, but “The Magnificent Seven” set out to be only that.

“The Magnificent Seven” has all of the feel of a period-piece version of “The Expendables” and only half of its bombastic attitude. “The Expendables 2” writer Richard Wenk, alongside co-writer Nic Pizzolatto (HBO’s “True Detective” showrunner), failed to ignite the magic between the seven anti-heroes that made its superior predecessors such an enthralling experience. Aside from the on-screen chemistry between Denzel Washington and Chris Pratt, the rest of this ensemble group felt muddled and ill-developed. As we see Washington’s character hurriedly round up his band of misfits, we don’t feel invested in the characters because they come off as hollow and their motivations don’t make sense.

There is no point in investing in character who value their lives so little that they unnecessarily go into certain death for a stranger they just met. Their decision-making process stems to little more than: “Well, it’s a Tuesday and I don’t have anything planned, so it’s a good a day as any to go die for a stranger I just met a few minutes ago.” Knowing the little we have come to realize about each character, they are financially driven and prone to being interested in self-preservation above most things, so casually putting their lives on the line for money they know they’ll never get to spend is out of character. Instead, we are force fed some schlock about the power of brotherhood when team-up films like “The Avengers” do a much better job establishing that comradery much more believably.



Denzel Washington and Chris Pratt in ‘The Magnificent Seven’

*Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing*

The problem with ensemble films like these is that if the story is weak, then the entire film feels inundated with seemingly disposable characters. Relying on the audience’s knowledge of well-worn tropes as a form of exposition is lazy and ineffective. We’ve encountered all of these archetypes before, but even then “The Magnificent Seven” doesn’t feel the need to go through the motions of developing all but two of its characters. That turns every other aspect of this film into less of an homage to Westerns and more of a cash-grab playing on our nostalgic sensibilities.

The first two acts of the film serve no other purpose than to introduce these shallow characters with one-line backstories into a skeleton story. We are meant to be in awe of recognizable actor that shows up on screen, but that shtick loses its appeal halfway through collecting each player. Some of the performances, like Washington, Pratt, and Hawke’s, are consistently enough to lead even the most slipshod story, and this proves to be the case for “The Magnificent Seven”. Fortunately, Ethan Hawke has a much superior Western coming out next month in the form of “In a Valley of Violence”. The rest of the cast is not so lucky, especially those whose talents felt like they were wasted or never fully utilized because of the basic writing that inherently stunted their characters.

The film’s final act, and its undeniable climax, are what the entirety of “The Magnificent Seven” was building towards. Each moving part on this locomotive goes into overdrive and it barrels into its destination, braking be damned. This is where director Antoine Fuqua really gives the film a fighting chance to shine. There is little to no dialogue when the fighting commences, just explosions and bullet wounds. Given Fuqua’s experience not just working with Washington, but also with climactic gunfights, he delivers a powerful final act where even the heroes aren’t safe.





The Cast Shows Their Numbers in 'The Magnificent Seven'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

Too often do these Hollywood-stylized films perjure themselves by sacrificing authenticity for sex-appeal. That usually translates to having our protagonists only getting mildly grazed in a firefight while every secondary and tertiary character lays bullet-riddled on a mound of corpses. Fuqua reminds us that this is the Wild West and no one is immune to its merciless nature. He opts for a grittier, more realistic take on the battles of old, giving the film a genuineness that almost makes up for the by-the-numbers approach he has delivered in the film up until that point.

Westerns will always hold an important social significance about a time when the law couldn't or wouldn't protect its people so vigilante action was needed. Sentiments like that are echoed even in our society today, and even masterfully incorporated in modern Westerns like this year's cinematic masterstroke, "Hell or High Water". Remaking a film for purely financial reasons or without even a minor attempt at adding something new to the conversation it creates leaves you with a product that is as barren as the desert it is set in. Antoine Fuqua tries to compensate for the narrative shortcomings of "The Magnificent Seven" by stuffing the film full of A-list actors and an explosive final act. It unfortunately proves not enough to with this duel.

*"The Magnificent Seven" opens everywhere on September 23rd. Featuring Denzel Washington, Chris Pratt, Ethan Hawke, Vincent D'Onofrio, Byung-hun Lee, Manuel Garcia-Rulfo, Martin Sensmeier, Haley Bennett, Peter Sarsgaard, Luke Grimes and Matt Bomer. Screenplay by Richard Wenk and Nic Pizzolatto. Directed by Antoine Fuqua. Rated "PG-13"*



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