

Up Up & Away for ‘Justice League’ From DC Comics

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – In the America of truth, justice and comic book movies, the DC brand – featuring hero icons Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman – has lagged behind their rivals at Marvel Studios. “Justice League” fills that gap admirably, after the slam-bam summer of Wonder Woman.

The plot is what makes this first go around with the Justice League that much more palatable. It’s about getting that league together, with a trio of the heroes – the Flash, Aquaman and Cyborg – somewhat reluctantly pulled in. Ben Affleck as The Batman is the glue in this teaming, using his wealth resources (his super power, “I’m rich”) to both gather the team and defeat an ancient alien menace. The villain is what makes the film go a bit computer generated porn-ish, but it’s not as bad as other comic book films of late. It’s the personalities that guide the action, and the script allows for some flexibility and character development, which always makes any story better.

Bruce Wayne (Affleck) gets wind of an otherworldly invasion while patrolling as The Batman. It’s an evil that is affirmed by Diana Prince/Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot) and Arthur Curry/Aquaman (Jason Momoa). An ultimate power is being gathered by a world destroyer named Steppenwolf (Ciaran Hinds) and the elements of that power is why Bruce Wayne is gathering the heroic forces.



Band of Hero Brothers – And One Vital Sister – in 'Justice League'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Bruce also hears of a phenomenon in Central City named Barry Allen (Ezra Miller), Also Known As The Flash. He has supersonic speed, and has just begun his career. Meanwhile, Diana is recruiting Cyborg (Ray Fisher), a tortured bionic man who needs guidance. With the quintet of heroes finally brought together, the only puzzle piece missing to crush Steppenwolf is the deceased Superman (Henry Cavill). Miracles can happen when the Justice League is formed.

The strongest part of the film is the journey to form the band of heroes. The mystery of Bruce Wayne's obsessions are always fun, and Ben Affleck taps into them in a much more subtle way than the previous "Batman v Superman." Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman has a much bigger picture motivation, and continues her mojo from her summer film debut. Both Jason Momoa's Aquaman and Ezra Miller's Flash form a snarky greek chorus counterpoint to all the seriousness, and offers some necessary humor to the team. Ray Fisher's newly minted Cyborg adds in the superhero angst that often drives the conflict.

The villain phase of the story is a bit more convoluted. Ciaran Hinds as Steppenwolf looked like a college mascot gone wrong, and spouts dialogue – written by Chris Terrio and Joss Whedon – that belongs in a scenario where a scoundrel ties a damsel to the tracks, while twirling his mustache. This is also where the Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) comes into overdrive, but I will give much maligned director Zack Snyder some credit for using it more effectively and taking a less-is-more approach.



Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot) and Bruce Wayne (Ben Affleck) in ‘Justice League’
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

The heroes both charm and frustrate, just because their personalities are what make the film zing, but then they are muted by the inevitable fights and CGI disharmony. The Batman “voice” has got to go, its hyper-breathiness makes Christian Bale’s Dark Knight sound like an elocution professor in comparison. Wonder Woman seems different than what was presented in the summer, which makes the “DC Universe” somewhat disjointed, but it’s not fatal. Jeremy Irons is an excellent Alfred Pennyworth. He’s now The Batman’s aide-de-camp rather than the butler, and has some good lines told in his very droll style.

So now that DC Universe is back on track, comic book movie fans can look forward to an endless parade of spin-offs and back stories over the coming years. When will it all come to a conclusion? I predict the Year 2525, but I wonder if CGI humans will be still be alive?

“Justice League” opens everywhere on November 17th, in IMAX and regular screenings. See local listings for IMAX theaters and show times. Featuring Ben Affleck, Gal Gadot, Henry Cavill, Ezra Miller, Jason Momoa, Ray Fisher, Diane Lane, Amy Adams, Jeremy Irons, J.K. Simmons and Claran Hinds. Written by Chris Terrio and Joss Whedon. Directed by Zach Snyder. Rated “PG-13”



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