

## ‘Aquaman’ is a Watery Sleep with the Fishes

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The dripping sound of water you will hear this upcoming weekend will be the tears of DC Comics fans, as they cry from frustration over the latest cinema hit job on one of the Super-Friends. The tepid and overlong “Aquaman” is another hero movie that tries to combine origin story and “first case” adventure, and fails at both.

Making the so-called “King of the Oceans” a more aquatic looking man beast – Jason Momoa fulfills the role succinctly – is fine (Aquaman looks like a blonde frat boy in the early comics), but the formula of these overblown DC Comic films... origin story, first adventure and sprinkle in some celebrity supporting roles... are like a satire now. If this film were done with bad special effects of the 1950s, instead of the beautifully visual undersea atmosphere rendering of now, it would qualify for riffing on Mystery Science 3000. Yeah, it’s that overblown and weird.

Arthur Curry (Jason Momoa) is a half breed. His mother is a Queen (Nicole Kidman) is from the undersea world of Atlantis, and his father (Temuera Morrison) is a human lighthouse keeper who found the Queen washed ashore, and took her in. They raise the boy to a certain point, but eventually the Queen has to return from her exile, prodded by enemy forces that want her dead.





Amber Heard as Mera and Jason Momoa as ‘Aquaman’

*Photo credit: Warner Bros.*

Arthur grows up, and eventually finds he has aquatic powers, including underwater breathing, communication, super-speed swimming, über strength and fish telepathy. Eventually he must go to Atlantis, under the prodding of Princess Mera (Amber Heard) and mentor Vulko (Willem Dafoe). There is an underwater war a-brewing, and it could affect Arthur’s adopted surface world.

Oh yeah, and there is a revenge story having to do with Arthur infiltrating a stand-off against undersea poachers. Waaay too much going on in both in whiplash multiple story arcs with tedious exposition. There were three story writers and a co-screenplay credit to David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick, who obviously made up that name to distance himself from the narrative carnage. The additional application of emotional threads by the normally reliable director James Wan (“The Conjuring”) felt like a desperate grab as well.

Jason Momoa as the Man of Water does a decent job buried under the pile of story manure, and he was actually a highlight of last year’s “Justice League” movie, but he had to endure this one to get to that one (if they’ll even revive either franchise). He is most comfortable being a hard drinking ne’er do well. When he’s talking to the sea creatures, man or beast, he fades into the background.



Nicole Kidman is Queen Atlanna in ‘Aquaman’



Photo credit: Warner Bros.

The celebrity cameos start with Nicole Kidman as Queen Atlanna (get it?), who has to wear the weirdest sea costume this side of tiki bar mermaid. Willem Dafoe doesn't fare much better, as he spends most of the film captured and on the sidelines. They both endure that digital age reversal, that began cleverly in the Marvel Studio films (Robert Downey Jr., Michael Douglas), but in A-man felt frightening, especially when Dafoe was spouting a manbun.

Somewhere, beyond the sea, is a decent movie realm for Aquaman, but this one ain't it. The pressure to deliver these superhero films has to be tremendous, with nervous executives asking for more "action, effects, sea monsters... but don't forget the heart!" You can't have everything, and as "Aquaman" proves, where would you put it?

*"Aquaman" opens everywhere on December 21st in 3D, IMAX and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D/IMAX theaters and show times. Featuring Jason Momoa, Amber Heard, Willem Dafoe, Patrick Wilson, Nicole Kidman, Temuera Morrison and Dolph Lundgren. Screenplay by David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick and Will Beall. Directed by James Wan. Rated "R"*



[22]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [23]  
Editor and Film Writer  
HollywoodChicago.com

[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [22]

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