

Superhero Film ‘Hancock’ With No Superhero Ancestry Proves Bold But Deadly Decision

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CHICAGO – With superhero films as hot in 2008 as psychedelics were in the 1960s, the new blockbuster superhero film “Hancock” fits in with the label but without any of the ancestry.

While 2008 superhero films such as “Iron Man,” “The Incredible Hulk,” “The Dark Knight,” “Hellboy II: The Golden Army” and “Punisher: War Zone” (along with “X-Men Origins: Wolverine” coming in 2009) are all based on previous stories with a previously ravenous fan base, “Hancock” with an alcoholic and listless Will Smith and Charlize Theron – who hides a surprise bombshell – literally comes from nowhere.



Charlize Theron (left) and Will Smith in “Hancock”.
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Entertainment

In fact, “Hancock” is the only 2008 superhero film not derived from a previously established comic book.



Will Smith in "Hancock".
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Entertainment

The original script for "Hancock," which was inked by Vincent Ngo in 1996 and called "Tonight, He Comes," was shuffled through the Hollywood director's circuit until director Peter Berg ("The Kingdom," "Friday Night Lights," "The Rundown") finally ate it up in Oct. 2006. Filming began in July 2007.

Its truly original origin could have either been its golden savior or its deadly assassin. The decision ultimately proved treacherous as everything it tried to do to be different just made it the same.

Its originality actually might not seem so novel, too, once you consider the 1983 film "The Return of Captain Invincible". In that film, Alan Arkin plays Captain Invincible and Christopher Lee plays his nemesis (Mr. Midnight).

Captain Invincible is asked to return from retirement to the superhero battlefields, but this time around, he's a raging alcoholic. Sound familiar? Uh huh.

Upon closer scrutiny, the principal downfall of "Hancock" isn't even in the question of its origins but more in the forcefulness of its script. "Hancock" felt entirely too *written*. A good film, of course, is written eloquently well – so well, in fact, that you forget it's written. A hackneyed story feels forcefully written.



Will Smith (center) "Hancock".

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Entertainment

After writers Vincent Ngo and Vince Gilligan launched off on their journey to script a man who can demolish the street beneath him at the mere jetting away into the sky, they added Superman-like strength. As for where to go next, you can actually feel them pondering the decision. They then inked something cliché because they were already committed to the process and the big Hollywood dollars would be on the line.

Now Smith's cliché costuming to look the superhero part was actually the least cliché part of the entire script. Smith's character despised it, appeared awkward in it and actually successfully sold you on more authentically being that inebriated chap. Sporting a costume that looked

like it could have been purchased at Walgreen’s on a man who felt more comfortable being naked was refreshingly witty.



Will Smith (second from left), Jason Bateman (second from right) and Charlize Theron in “Hancock”.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Entertainment

All in all, we can’t be satisfied with all the “Hancock” plot twists and turns because we didn’t get to the heart of what actually makes a superhero a superhero. Will Smith himself doesn’t know and couldn’t tell you if you asked him – even after he has been jailed, rehabilitated and PR spun by Jason Bateman who’s trying to change the world.

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While it is a bit of a twist to make your “good” superhero hated and then needed and then loved once he learns to love himself, focusing on that internal exploration of the superhero felt like the self-discovery process should have happened privately with Dr. Phil rather than as a central plotline in a major Hollywood film.

Now Charlize Theron’s character had teeth. Will Smith as an anonymous “John Hancock” who can’t remember his genesis is branded by the film as a Bruce Willis-like “Unbreakable” character, but who the heck is Charlize Theron? Is she just the scorching wife of PR man Jason Bateman or does she have something incredible up her sleeve, too?

“Hancock” director Peter Berg would have been better served directing this script with a focus on her as the central character – a character who veils who she really is under the guise of humanity rather than the bumbling, stumbling Will Smith who merely cloaks his superhero depression with a bottle. Any takers for “The Incredible Housewife”?

“Hancock,” which features Will Smith, Charlize Theron, Jason Bateman and director Michael Mann in a small acting role, opened everywhere on July 2, 2008.



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