Now On VOD: 'Birds of Prey' Is No Lame Duck and Soars Beyond Expectations

Submitted by JonHC [1] on March 26, 2020 - 7:41pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Comic book fatigue is real, and not just because there is an embarrassment of riches in screened content available, but because more than a few of them take the same predictable approach. That's what sank films like "Justice League" and "Suicide Squad", and used to threaten the future of the DC cinematic universe, but no longer. I'm happy to report that "Birds of Prey" is no lame duck.

"Birds of Prey", or if you're feeling extra confident in your lung capacity, "Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn", almost feels like DC's response to the success of Marvel's R-rated "Deadpool", but while similar to "Deadpool 2", they are still each extremely different. The cotton candy color palette with the carnival funhouse narrative structure bombards our senses, leaving us adequately whelmed. In a story full of backstories and tangential tales, everything feels fully fleshed out and on-brand for the characters and aesthetic.



Photo credit: Warner Bros

Any fan of "Suicide Squad" is automatically a fan of Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) solely based on the fact that she was the only standout of that misfit(s) movie. I'm sorry, I don't make the rules, I just point them out. Following a similar irreverent attitude, Birds of Prey takes us on a torrid trip into the mind of madness. For better or worse, every aspect stays true to our main character's psyche, distorting our sense of time and even what details we should be focusing on. It might sound a bit psychologically frustrating, but don't worry, there are a couple of musical numbers in between to keep your spirits high. Director Cathy Yan hit the nail on the head with the pacing and tone, especially when our unreliable narrator has a screw loose.

The only way a film like this can work without confusing or disorienting the viewer is by having a solid framework in place, and screenwriter Christina Hodson does exactly that. For something that's loosely about birds, Hodson creates a great narrative balance that allows the story

to go on its flights of fancy while keeping all the important parts surprisingly grounded. This isn't a hero redemption story but ends up being a supervillain origin story, which is infinitely better. Harley Quinn is best known as the acrobatic sidekick of The Joker, who is a villain in her own right, but kept from reaching "super" status because of her connection with the clown. From the beginning, we explore Harley's "break-up", then follow her on a rebound adventure that ultimately ends with her finding the love she ever really needed: her own.

Sure, it sounds like some sappy Lifetime movie, but what elevates it is the attention to detail, especially when it comes to developing the female characters and their friendship of convenience. One of the biggest stand-out scenes happens in the middle of a beautifully choreographed fight sequence where, all while literally kicking ass, one character offers the other a hair tie since her we just destroyed by a goon. This small act alone speaks volumes to the creative team behind the unconventional Birds of Prey. It gives it an air of authenticity that the typical male writer could never come up with.



Photo credit: Warner Bros

Margot Robbie continues to soar as Harley Quinn, but where Suicide Squad felt like her (hypersexualized) character only existed for the entertainment of others, "Birds of Prey" literally frees her to be her own character and to own her own brand of villainy. The cast is stacked with fantastic performances from Rosie Perez, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Jurnee Smollett-Bell, Ella Jay Basco, and Ali Wong. Even Ewan McGregor as the flamboyant sadomasochist Black Mask, along with the submissive-to-his-dom, homoerotic partner Victor Zsasz (Chris Messina), play perfect foils to our grab bag of villains, heroes, and vigilantes. The real villains needed to be an especially extreme brand of disturbing to make the casual gore and violence our protagonists deliver seem pale in comparison, and like the film as a whole, it was an unqualified success.

"Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn" available now on VOD. Featuring Margot Robbie, Rosie Perez, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Jurnee Smollett-Bell, Ewan McGregor, Ella Jay Basco, and Chris Messina. Directed by Cathy Yan. Written by Christina Hodson. Rated "R"


[20]

By JON ESPINO [21]
Film & Video Game Critic
HollywoodChicago.com
jon@hollywoodchicago.com [20]

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[20] mailto:jon@hollywoodchicago.com
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