

'Eternals' isn't the Hero Film We Deserve, But the One We Need Right Now

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on November 5, 2021 - 12:52pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – At some point, everything evolves. This isn't something that's exclusive to Pokemon, but a process that all of us have undergone to get to where we are. Evolution is always gradual, only made noticeable to us in retrospect. Are you exactly the same person that you were 10 years ago? Hopefully not. There will come a point when we look back at *Eternals* with much more generous eyes and realize that not only is this a good film, but a necessary one.

I won't say that this comic book property is an obscure one because I don't want any of the ire from fanboys yelling reasons at me for why this property is so well-known. What I will say is that it is not one I'm at all familiar with, at least not to the caliber of some of Marvel's other juggernauts like Iron-Man, Captain America, Thor, etc. Part of the excitement I had going into *Eternals* stemmed from not knowing a single thing about any character or knowing what role they played in the MCU as a whole. Nothing is going to prepare you for what it is like to experience this film, and that is where the biggest problem arises.



Photo credit: Disney

When you've seen as many films as I have, you begin to notice patterns or formulas that live in the genetic make-up of certain movies. DC film

fans appreciate their darker, more tonally serious approach because the grit feels more real-world, making the stakes feel more personal. Marvel film fans tend to love the more lighthearted, humor-heavy tones in their films, appreciating being transported to other worlds and all the fantasy elements that come with them. Very rarely will you find someone who likes both, and this is where the preference for one over the other will dominate how you end up viewing this film.

Director and co-writer Chloé Zhao creates a superpowered experience that hasn't been done on such a big-budget scale. That is not to say that this hasn't been done at all because some of my favorite films from that specific genre, like *Fast Color* and *Chronicle*, all employ similar approaches, but were all considered indie films. It makes sense that Zhao would use a similar technique, especially since the focus of her films is always on natural beauty, both in location and in the spirit of the people/characters involved. There is an undeniable muted approach—when compared to other Marvel films—she uses in *Eternals* that both remind us that these stories are set in our world, but also that they involve beings that are not from it. While the visual style might be enough to alienate those who have come to expect the typical candy-colored comic palette, my biggest issue comes from the narrative structure.

We all remember when *Justice League* rushed out of production in order to compete with the monumental box office success of the *Avengers*, trying to run when most of the characters hadn't even learned how to walk. The myriad of plot issues aside, the biggest issue with *Justice League* is that they didn't lay the groundwork for this in the way Marvel did for their epic team-up. There was little to no attachment to these characters because we hadn't seen these iterations before, and the brief introductions to them were obviously and necessarily rushed. Enter the Eternals, full of characters we are meeting for the first time, already geared up and with a history we're not privy to (at least not until later in the film). The narrative structure, while essential for the type of story it is trying to tell, comes with risks. Since we can't know about the history of our characters, we don't get to see much, if any, individual development that would endear them to us. Even when we do see one of them on-screen by themselves, they are almost immediately joined by a team member or other main character.



Photo credit: Disney

If you're not put off by the ponderous pacing or the humble lack of gaudy flair, this film offers not only an evolution of the comic book film genre but also a revolution in representation. A diverse cast consisting of stars like Salma Hayek, Gemma Chan, Kumail Nanjiani, Brian Tyree Henry, Lauren Ridloff, and Ma Dong-seok (Don Lee) is already a great start, but being able to see that representation on-screen is monumental. Without going too into specifics, we see great queer and deaf representation, something Marvel/Disney has shied away from in the past. This film, although flawed in a few ways, is the essential next step this genre needs to take. Supporting this film and the promise it has delivered is important because the time is fast approaching where the same old approach will bore even the audience that currently clamors for it. I can only hope that Marvel will let other auteur filmmakers take a crack at some of their properties because while the status quo well hasn't run dry just yet, it is getting very close to not being able to quench our thirsts.

"Eternals" in theaters November 5th. Featuring Gemma Chan, Richard Madden, Kumail Nanjiani, Lia McHugh, Brian Tyree Henry, Lauren Ridloff, Barry Keoghan, Ma Dong-seok (Don Lee), Harish Patel, Kit Harington, Salma Hayek, and Angelina Jolie. Directed by Chloé Zhao. Written by Chloé Zhao, Patrick Burleigh, Ryan Firpo and Kaz Firpo. Rated "PG-13"



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