

Review: Aquaman

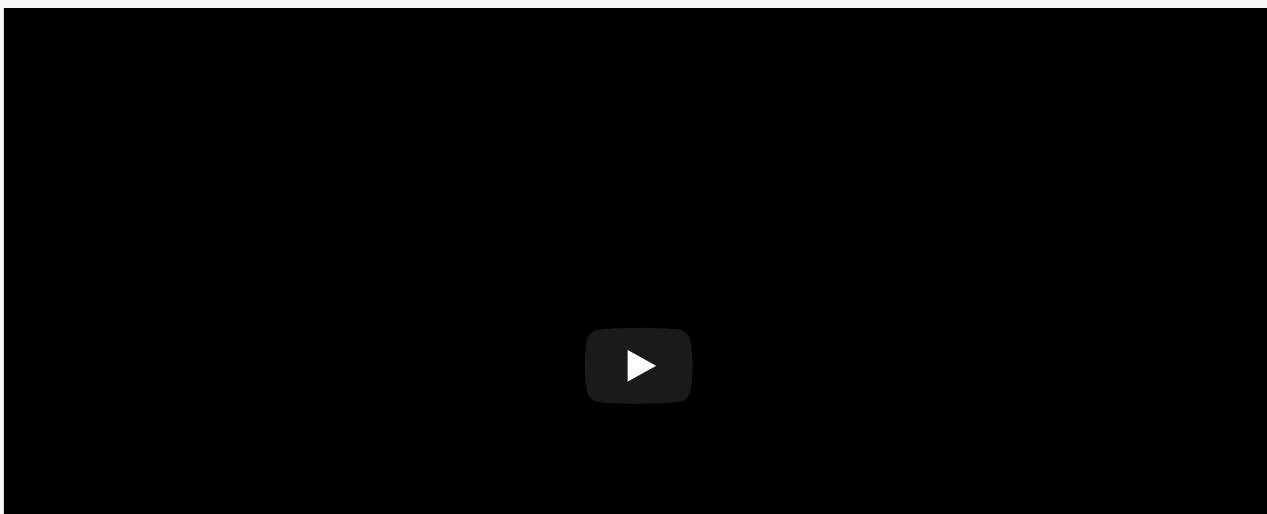
2018-12-22 13:00:00 by [Chris Compendio](#)

"ALRIGHT!"



At some point a few years ago, there must have been an urgent corporate meeting at Warner Bros. Pictures about *Aquaman*. The subject of the meeting: "how do we make Aquaman not lame?" In the laundry list of ridiculous suggestions, I imagine that some items included "cast a buff, charismatic dude as Arthur Curry" and "feature the electric guitar prominently."

It's the end of 2018, a pretty darn good year for comic book movies, and against all odds, the weird hodgepodge of elements that churned together to create *Aquaman* actually works. Well, when the movie isn't having a weird identity crisis.



Aquaman

Director: James Wan

Release Date: December 21, 2018

Rated: PG-13

The James Wan-directed film focuses on the "child of two worlds," Arthur Curry (Jason Momoa) being the son of a male human (Temuera Morrison) and the Atlantean queen (Nicole Kidman). Curry's half-brother Orm (Patrick Wilson) rules Atlantis, but his war-mongering behavior towards the surface world leads to concern from his betrothed Mera (Amber Heard), who recruits Curry to stop Orm and take the throne.

It is downright impossible for me to describe *Aquaman* without dropping the titles of several other film titles. The set-up and the dynamic between Arthur and Orm are reminiscent of *Black Panther*. The journey of Arthur and Mera turns into *National Treasure*. Atlantis straight-up looks like underwater *Avatar*. By the end, I thought that the new *Godzilla* trailer was playing again by accident, and over a *Lord of the Rings* battle sequence. Heck, there's a point in the film that even reminded me of *How to Train Your Dragon 2*. But will it blend?



The short answer to that question is yes, and it all comes down to Jason Momoa as a leading man. We got only a taste of him in *Justice League*, but besides some utterances of "ALRIGHT!" and "MY MAN!" there wasn't too much to chew from his part in that film. It did provide us with a glimpse of his personality, and that is fully expanded in Wan's take on the character. I say that Momoa is the key to holding it all together because he remains a constant throughout the film. Arthur displays a disheveled, devil-may-care attitude, and while much of the film can be said to be derivative of other modern superhero films, I don't think this is the case for this particular protagonist.

Most films nowadays seem to want to copy *Deadpool* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*, but upon close inspection, *Aquaman* tries to forge a tone of its own through its protagonist. Despite his antics, Arthur is never an annoying or boring character. He has qualms with Atlantis and his heritage, but he ultimately answers the call to action not because of any profound change in his character, but because he realizes that it is consistent with his own desire of helping and saving regular folks. Truthfully though, Arthur (and the film as a whole) could be a little meaner to us surface folks for pollution. Yes, war-mongering ocean people are bad, but why were they the only ones who needed to change during this movie?

We've come to a point in blockbusters where "subverting expectations" means someone making a quip during a cliched serious moment, and there's a lot of instances of Arthur interjecting in such scenes with bro-y moments. But there's just something about Momoa's delivery that made me laugh instead of roll my eyes. It helps that Amber Heard compliments him well, being more of a co-lead (like Black Widow in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* or the Wasp in *Ant-Man in the Wasp*) more than a sidekick. While they had excellent comedic chemistry, their romantic chemistry was lacking in comparison.



Another reason why I'd compare *Aquaman* to *Black Panther* is due to the apparent devotion to world-building. Atlantis is a world that I was hoping I'd want to immerse myself, but everything (ironically, no pun intended) seemed very surface level. Bright colors and futuristic technology were prevalent, but I wanted a greater understanding of just how Atlantean society operated. Like *Black Panther* in Wakanda (although less so, with Wakanda being rooted in Afro-futurism and Atlantis being pure fantasy), this film made me wish for some sort of full Atlantis miniseries instead.

What is the culture like? What is the experience of being a normal Atlantean? Why the adverseness to the "half-breed" of Arthur Curry? Do people support the war that Orm is trying to stir up? Instead, we just get a bunch of extras who love to see brutal acts of bloodlust at a stadium. It's a shame because I found the history of Atlantis as described by exposition machine Willem Dafoe to be fascinating, with so many different factions and species splitting off from Atlantis (again, like *Avatar*).



In the end, *Aquaman* is just a classic Shakespearean tale that mixes a lot of strange inspirations together—even the soundtrack is eclectic, with the electric guitar that I mentioned at the top, some traditional orchestral music, and even electronic synthesized music. The drama between Orm and Arthur severely disappointed, however. There was a real opportunity to make Orm almost Killmonger-esque, but Patrick Wilson is just decidedly super hammy in the role. I dare you to try to not laugh every time he says "Ocean Master."

As soon as I was able to find my bearings amongst all of the craziness, I was able to just sit back and enjoy the action. The underwater sequences work, given the uncharted territory of having to simulate underwater combat, but the action on-ground is where the film was at its strongest. A chase/battle scene on the rooftops of Sicily, Italy was for sure my highlight. I don't think choreographed fights are particularly Wan's strong suit—I think his *Furious 7* was inferior to Justin Lin's work in the *Fast & Furious* series, with both that and *Aquaman* having too many unnecessary "stylistic" camera motions, but cheers to Wan for trying to hone his craft beyond his usual horror movies, *The Conjuring* being one I enjoy in particular.

Aquaman is not a cultural force to be reckoned with like *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, or even DC's own *Wonder Woman*—DC missed the opportunity to make an environmentalist movie the same way *Wonder Woman* is a feminist one. Considering the uphill struggle that DC has with its film universe, the movie is fun enough to help you forget some of DC's missteps, and it helps to keep this franchise afloat.

And yes, that pun is completely intended.



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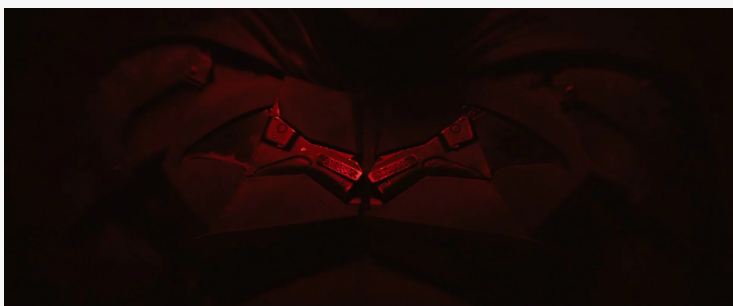
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Matt Reeves shares camera test for Rob Pattinson as 'The Batman'

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#TheBatman#CameraTest<https://t.co/M1tAE2aTA1>

— Matt Reeves (@mattreevesLA) February 13, 2020

On Twitter this evening, director Matt Reeves shared a camera test for his upcoming Rob Pattinson starring *The Batman* and we now have a decent idea of how the former *Twilight* star will look as the caped crusader. Cast in a light that almost made me confuse him for *Daredevil*, I do have to admit that Rob looks pretty cool as *Batman*. There's maybe a bit too much armor going on, but this suit does seem to be noticeably different from past silver screen *Batman* iterations.

The darker lighting is clearly in an effort to see how Pattinson will look in *Batman's* typical low-light situations. It's not often you see *Batman* gallivanting around Gotham in broad daylight and shooting anything in low-light can be tough. Nailing the look of a costume under those circumstances is key and Reeves seems to have found a solid design.

Now we just need to see a trailer or something and I might actually be on board with this film.

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