

Greetings, dear reader. I know that you're already upset with me for not really liking this movie very much. You thought it was excellent, and you don't want to hear my negativity and my whiny, nitpicky complaints about a perfectly entertaining film, right?

I've already stated somewhat publicly that this movie demonstrates much ignorance about how to make a film, so you might be thinking that I'm upset that this movie doesn't meet my "film school standards," and I must just be upset because this movie isn't *Citizen Kane* or *The Godfather*, right?

Wrong.

The reasons why I dislike this movie are actually reasons that you, dear reader, can probably understand. When I say that the makers of this movie don't know how to make a film, I'm not saying that I wish they would do a better job at speaking in some secret movie language only film students understand involving perfectly composed shots and some sort of subtle, deeper meaning. I'm saying I wish they had told their story better so that the average viewer, not just the film student, could get more out of it.

So let's take this one step at a time, going element by element, and see if I can help you understand why I think this movie doesn't make the grade.

First we ought to consider the editing. Why should you care about the editing? Because the editing tells you a *lot* about what's happening in the story, so it can be very confusing when a film's editing is poor. For example, consider the beginning of the movie when Hippolyta (Diana's mother) is telling the story of Diana's creation. This sequence is weirdly interrupted with a cut to Antiope (Robin Wright) training Diana – a shot that comes right the heck out of nowhere and is tonally at odds with the scene, thus distracting from the story – which is so jarring that I was almost alarmed and shocked by its appearance. I couldn't figure out what the heck was happening or how to interpret it, which I soon found was just the beginning of this film's disorienting sloppiness.

I was also disoriented by the misuse of "look shots." Here's what that means: if one shot shows me Person X turning to look at something, and the next shot shows me an interesting event or object, I will assume this means Person X is looking at the interesting event or object. That's one of the most basic concepts in editing, and filmmakers use it to tell you what's going on in movies all the time. In this film, however, we see Chris Pine reaching into Doctor Poison's lab for the notebook, Doctor Poison turning as if she sees something, and a cut back to Chris Pine taking the notebook, which made me (and likely other viewers) think she saw him take it, but she actually doesn't notice that the notebook is gone until he's had a few seconds to get away. This is rather pathetic miscommunication on the film's part, but it gets worse.

"Who would sing for us?" Wonder Woman says kindly to Charlie, prompting him to burst into song. It's a lovely moment, but it quickly becomes a confusing one. They cut to the next scene, and Charlie's singing can still be heard, which suggested to me, and the audience, that Charlie had (very comically) just kept on singing all throughout their long journey. Then, suddenly, we hear Charlie talking over his singing. As Charlie's singing fades out, it becomes completely

unclear whether the singing was just the sound from the previous scene lingering on, meaning what the audience and I perceived to be a joke was actually a misunderstanding on our part, or if Charlie's speaking was from the next scene and just started early. It seemed like everyone else at my screening was just as confused as I was at this moment, as evidenced by the abrupt end of their laughter once they weren't sure what just happened.

This means that the movie had a lot of moments when it wasn't understandable to me, the film major, or to the general public, which is an embarrassing level of incompetence for a major Hollywood blockbuster. A few slip-ups are fine, but when enough bad cuts make it into the movie, stay through the re-edits, and somehow end up in theaters, it sends the message that the makers of the film either weren't well-trained or simply did not care about what they were doing – and that kind of message doesn't put me in the mood to feel entertained. I think a lot of viewers were inclined to think that they, as viewers, misunderstood the film – that the film was doing a fine job and they were just bad at understanding it. But let's never give the film so much credit and assume all misunderstandings are our fault – if a film communicates something poorly, blame the film.

“But JD, you're just ranting about a lack of ‘competence.’ All I care about is the *contents* of the film. I mean, isn't it nice that this movie wasn't trying to be a Marvel movie? It was such a *DC* film! It was so gritty and *real!*” Okay, fine, but are you sure that's such a good thing?

The film is “realistic” to the point that it's completely unreal. For some reason, we've all decided that a movie looks like reality if it looks really, really gray. Consequently, for a contemporary film to present a place that is itself more gray than the average filming location – specifically London – it must become *so* gray that it has less color than real life. This made *Wonder Woman's* scenes in London just feel bizarre – I couldn't believe in the reality of the world because it was gray to the point of being a kind of impressionist satire, and some shots looks like they were in black and white. In short, the “realism” backfires, and the visual style that so many people find “gritty” is just distracting for me.

This visual style is also distracting in ways that do have narrative implications. The color-grading made all of the characters wearing pinker colors stand out from all the others, even though most of the characters wearing outfits on that part of the color spectrum were just extras. In film, you're supposed to put the colors that make a person stand out on the main characters – consider Little Orphan Annie's outfit (and hair), or Belle and the Beast's exclusive right to the color blue in the 1991 *Beauty and the Beast*. Consequently, I kept expecting one of the figures in magenta to walk “downstage” and become a significant character, in accordance with the basic grammar of theater and film, but it never happened. The fact that everything in this version of London is gray also made the Lasso of Truth stand out so much that I found it hard to believe that the people walking around Diana and Chris Pine didn't notice it.

“Okay,” you say, “so you don't like the use of color, but that's still not what's important about this movie. What's important is the story. What's wrong with the story itself?”

Oh, lot's of things. But my biggest gripe with the story is that it's *boring*.

“JD! HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY SAY THIS MOVIE IS BORING?!?!”

I hear you, dear reader. My problem is that I’ve seen my fair share of Hollywood movies, so I can too easily recognize how this one is the same as all of the other superhero movies and fantasy blockbusters that have come out over the past 25 years (or perhaps since the original *Star Wars*). It’s also just a standard messianic story that has almost all the same features as films like *The Matrix*, *The LEGO Movie*, etc.

Don’t believe me? All right - let’s run through the story, citing our sources.

Once there was a very special child – a child unlike anyone else with a special destiny – raised in isolation (for her protection) with no friends her own age, unable to practice her powers and unaware of the extremity of her abilities (see *Harry Potter*, *Frozen*). When she hears of a great evil that has reappeared after many years and promises doom for many people, she decides she must leave the comfort of her home and go fight it (see *Mulan*). Her guide takes her to some unpleasant parts of the world to arrange transportation, and is only able to get it illegally with the help of some very questionably characters (see *Star Wars*). Then come the trials and tribulations of a standard long and treacherous journey, proving her to be (and forming her into) the right person to defeat the enemy (see “The Hero’s Journey Arc”). Then it seems that all hope is lost and she was wrong all along – her faith in a prophecy was misplaced, so now there’s nothing she can do (see *Moana*, which is itself quite derivative) until it turns out that – unsurprising surprise twist! – someone we thought was a good guy turns out to be the bad guy (see *Harry Potter*, ironically). So he tells her to join him so they may rule together, which she refuses (see the *Star Wars* franchise), she demonstrates her strength of character by showing compassion (see *Moana*, *Pocahontas*, and most movies with a female protagonist actually), her friend dies (see *Star Wars*, *Captain America*, *Big Hero Six*, a lot of the *Harry Potter* films, and most Disney movies really), and she wins.

Yes, I know a lot of movies have cliché stories, but for this film, I just felt that I was watching Hollywood’s reruns from the moment the logo appeared. I’m tired of a lot of these clichés. I’m tired of people hiding the truth from the protagonist as if that protects them, which is a load of bull. I’m tired of movies thinking they can surprise me by revealing that the villain isn’t who we first thought. (I actually sensed that someone in England was secretly on the villainous side, and I noticed that the film never really confirmed that the fellow we were led to *believe* was Eros was Eros, so I found the twist pretty boring.) It’s not fun being punished with boredom just for having seen a lot of other movies.

“But what about its positive messages?”

Fair point, and I’ll come back to that later, but what about its negative messages? If you don’t believe it has any, that’s probably because you don’t have quite the same values that I do. I am a skeptic, and that means I like critical thinking and dislike blind faith.

This story, like many stories from Hollywood, celebrates the *beauty* of blind faith. Media that encourages belief for the sake of belief is entirely commonplace, so I don’t want to blame a 2017 production for an ancient problem, but the message is particularly worrisome. Consider the fact

that Diana, in her faith, actually *kills someone*. She's *that* dedicated to her beliefs, even though they're wrong, but this isn't presented as a character flaw of hers.

Of course, it helps that the movie made the person she wrongly killed a Nazi, so it's hard to fault her here, but what if it hadn't been a Nazi? What if she blamed America for all of the weaponry they sent to Europe which fueled the war – whom might her faith lead her to kill then? More importantly, if she's so resistant to killing people that she mercy on the woman making chemical weapons, shouldn't she then feel remorse for her mistake? My point is that her actions here seem fine to us as a matter of good luck – she's lucky the person she erroneously kills is worthy of death anyway, but that doesn't change the fact that her conviction in her beliefs is flat-out dangerous, but never receives criticism or punishment.

Now, one might read the fact that she seems naive and ignorant about how the world works throughout most of the story as a criticism, but I don't think this is accurate. When she's walking through the trenches, seeing the suffering, and wondering why they don't all charge after the enemy, she's told that there's nothing they can do. She doesn't believe them, so they call her crazy and naive and ignorant, prompting her to prove them all wrong. Because that's what always happens in cliché Hollywood films: whoever gets called out for having too much childlike faith always proves the skeptics wrong. It's overdone, and it's boring.

I'll concede there are a few scenes in which her childlike ignorance is the joke, so one might call this criticism, but it takes us right into another problem. How sexist is it for so much of a movie to focus on a man telling a woman how the world works and how people ought to behave? Is a movie about a woman who's absolutely clueless about how to function like a grown-up really the movie feminists have always wanted?

Again, the problem here is the film's thoughtlessness. It acts without thinking. And that makes it rather sloppy, with a lot of loose ends.

How am I supposed to believe that the God of Truth is wrong about the fundamental nature of humans (and therefore paradoxically believes something that's false)? How am I supposed to believe that the creepy chemist lady just so happened to conveniently have a container on hand that could easily withstand a gas that eats through gas masks? How am I supposed to believe that the way Zeus kept the Amazons safe was to give them *absolutely no vision* of the threats looming just outside their borders? Not even a radar? And at what point did Princess Diana start calling herself *Queen* of the Amazons – did I miss something?

“So ... you hate the movie?”

No, not particularly. I'm just sick of people acting like it's great. It's not great, but it's acceptable. It gets about a C+. (Note that my star ratings are always on a strange curve, which I really ought to explain sometime.) This movie has some fun moments though.

The comedy is particularly strong. I enjoy seeing the characters play off of each other, and I also like what the film does with both mythology and the fundamentals of the superhero genre. Many of the “superhero-style” visuals are actually very creative and make for great spectacles. But

passive viewers (which at this point – pardon my snobbishness – is the general public) don't give it much thought. They see a movie that's the kind of story they're used to with a couple funny moments and a romance and they're happy. Fine. Like what you like.

Just don't act like the film is excellent purely on the grounds that it's the first female superhero movie. What I would advocate is trying to find a way to be critical of the film for all of its flaws, while also giving it just enough praise to pat Hollywood on the back for a step in the right direction. We should never be so accepting of a "just progressive enough" movie that producers becomes content with mediocrity, but it is only pragmatic to give a relatively positive rating to a film that is paving the way to better and better Hollywood films to come.