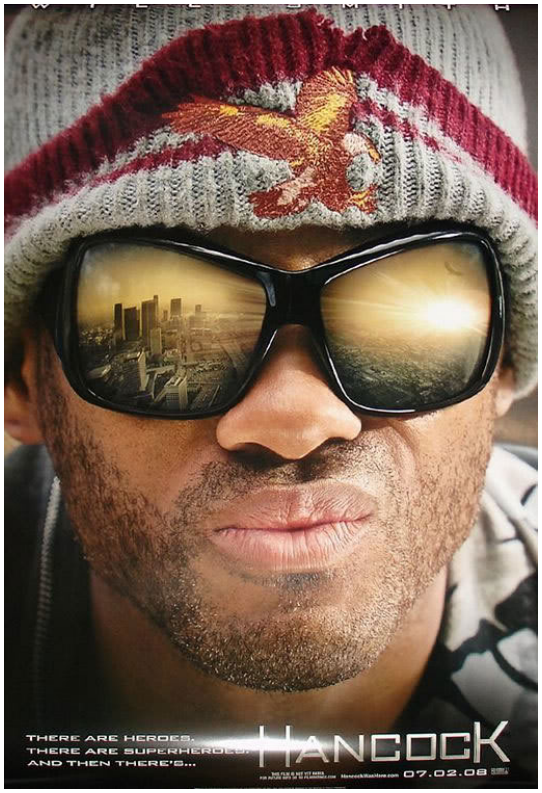
There's only three things you can count on in life. Death, taxes, and The Mitch Man being Johnny on the freaking spot for us every week with excellent reviews of all the latest films of note to hit the theater. We sent Mitch out to see "Hancock" last night on its opening weekend, and Mitch calls it the hardest film he had to review this year. In it, Will Smith plays a unlikable drunken twisted version of Superman, a role Mitch says only The Fresh Prince could pull off.



Will Smith's latest sure-to-be-huge blockbuster "Hancock" might be the hardest film I've had to review this year.

Like last week's action/adventure flick, "Wanted", this film is full of plot holes, groan inducing bad dialog, paper thin characters, and a director who seems to be asleep at the switch. Both films try to pass themselves off as original, but in reality, they are nothing but retreads. But at least with "Wanted", you got some incredible action sequences. With "Hancock", it's the same old superhuman battles seen so many times before in any Superman, Spider-Man, or X-Men movie.

But as a movie fan, I cannot deny that I enjoyed watching this movie, mostly due to the effort of Smith, the most bankable star working today. It is also aided by the fact that the concept of a very flawed, disliked superhero in a movie where those

flaws are played often for laughs IS a bit unique.

Of course the director, Peter Berg, quite often forgot whether he was directing a satire, a comedy, a tragedy, a love story, or a drama...so it seems that whenever he painted himself into a storyline corner, he chose to make the noise and action loud enough to drown out the logic trying desperately to be heard.

Hancock's powers are about as generic and unimaginative as possible. He's a surly, drunken, African-American Superman; plain and simple. He has super-strength, he's invulnerable, and he can fly. Sound familiar? Give tons of credit to Smith here, as the concept of making an unlikable Superman out of an African-American would normally be a very risky and controversial decision. But not when it's Will Smith. His demeanor is such that he quickly moves beyond the gruff exterior, and you are wanting to know what's behind his obvious depression fueling his bad attitude.

Unfortunately, that revelation takes far too long to get to. After saving the life of not-that-talented PR Man Ray Embrey (Jason Bateman), an effort that causes a huge trail derailment, Ray invites Hancock back to his home. An eternal optimist, Ray sees the good in Hancock, and thinks he has a way to get him back into the public's good graces.

Hancock doesn't seem to be interested, which delights Ray's wife Mary (Charlize Theron), who doesn't care for Hancock, and doesn't want him around. But after some time alone to think, Hancock agrees to go through with an image remake, which starts with the obligatory press conference where he apologizes for his actions and vows to be better. This was a good send up of the current method of Celebrity Mea Culpa; a coddled actress, athlete, singer reading a prepared statement that he/she obviously didn't write, spoken with clear disdain for both the message and the people listening.

Hancock even begrudgingly accepts a prison sentence...although I found that a

little hard to believe since he never stood trial. Of course he could break out at any time, but chooses to stay put, willing to give Ray's plan the time it needs to succeed. Sure enough, crime rises while he's out of commission, and a call quickly comes from the Mayor to get him out.

Once again, this movie is similar to "Wanted" as there is a major plot twist that takes the movie in another direction. Where the twist didn't quite work for me in "Wanted", I will disagree with many critics and say that I actually liked the twist in this one. It took me completely by surprise, and after revealed, the movie took on a very different tone.

A very rare feat, we have a plot twist that simultaneously makes a movie more interesting and completely muddled. With this, I am reminded of the last time Smith and Theron were in a movie together, "The Legend of Bagger Vance"; a film that was also entertaining, but infuriatingly illogical. I choose not to get into the details of these deficiencies, as doing so would certainly spoil it for anyone who has not yet seen the film.

Suffice to say, it's a given in a superhero movie that the hero must have a weakness. Hancock's weakness is almost an convoluted as the origins of his powers that we finally get half-way through the film.

So why will this film still make well over $100 million at the box office? Because Will Smith never has a flop, even if the movie isn't that good. It's quite simple why Smith doesn't fail; because he's such a good actor as to make any role he plays worth watching. He can handle any kind of role, from comedy to action to heavy drama, and do it all with a natural ease and a style that the audience always seems to identify with.

"Hancock", therefore, is a very entertaining disappointment. I think you will enjoy it even more than "Wanted", but it is still a frustrating missed opportunity. With so many movies based on comic books, the genre was

ripe for someone to come along with something totally original in the form of either a satire or a drama that focused more on the human side of the super-human. "Hancock" represented a great chance for that...but they chose to make it just the same as all the others we've seen.

My Rating - Kelly Holcomb (2 footballs).