Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 132 minutes

This Disney feature will premiere at cinemas on Sept. 3. It will debut on Disney+ immediately following its 45-day exclusive theatrical release.

While we have gotten a break from Marvel comic book-themed entertainment for the past two years, the studio now appears to be making up for lost time. In fact, they are seemingly releasing even more product based on their properties, including the recent film, “Black Widow.” This week sees the debut of “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings,” which introduces a new character who may not be as familiar to viewers as Captain America, Iron Man, or The Hulk. The end results aren’t exactly spectacular, but this is a decent debut and offers enough enjoyable moments to earn itself a modest recommendation.

Shang-Chi (Simu Liu) is a San Francisco parking lot attendant who goes by the name of Shaun. The unambitious young man spends most of his days joking around with his best friend, Katy (Awkwafina). When thugs looking for a magical jewel threaten the protagonist, he unleashes an

unexpected barrage of defensive moves. As it turns out, Shaun was raised in Asia and has incredible abilities bestowed by his late mother Jiang Li (Fala Chen) and supervillain father, Wenwu (Tony Leung) aka The Mandarin.

After spending his childhood being trained with his sister Xialing (Meng’er Zhang) to be assassins, the boy escaped from his dad’s clutches wearing a precious stone. Now, his pop is set on collecting the jewel for a dangerous purpose. Shaun must retake the name of Shang-Chi and resolve his family issues, both with his father and estranged sister.

As one might expect, this is yet another superhero origin story, meaning that the plotting feels very familiar. A great deal of time is spent introducing the lead, as well as the various supporting characters. And, there are a noticeable number of training scenes. There are flashbacks involving the protagonist learning to hone his skills, not to mention later bits that include further development, as well as montages of supporting cast members learning to fight against their enemies.

It’s repetitive, but the lead is likable and there is a good sense of camaraderie between Shaun and his friend Katy. Their interactions offer a bit of lightness and levity while the story goes through the motions explaining the history of the stones and the titular rings, as well as the imminent threat and mission at hand. There is also a welcome attempt to emphasize the familial relationships. In particular, the son sets out to convince his father to try to repair their bond.

One can also expect to see a significant cameo or two. One involves a comical figure from the past and earns a chuckle. Still, not all of the humor lands and the surprise appearance feels more awkward the longer the person hovers in the background.

The movie is also slickly shot. There are some exciting moments as the protagonist is attacked in San Francisco, as well as a thrilling battle between the heroes and villains on skyscraper scaffolding.

The only thing that mutes the effect of these scenes is the constant use of CGI. There is always going to be some work required, given the fantastic creatures and dangerous scenarios. However, it becomes too prevalent later in the feature. The heroes end up squaring off against entirely digital creations and ultimately start to look like computer effects themselves.

The video-game feel ultimately lessens the threat and human interest in the story.

But franchise fans should still be entertained. And for those interested, there are a couple of references to a bigger story developing from this feature. This is especially true in one of the two post-credit sequences (that actually alters some of the lengthy exposition delivered earlier in the film).

In the end, “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings,” isn’t exactly a knock-out. But, the cast is likable and the movie does a solid job of developing the characters and offering some potential for future installments.

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