

"SALTBURN" IS A SIMMERING TALE OF DECEPTION!

By LaDale Anderson

HOLLYWOOD—I really love the month of December because I feel like I finally get the opportunity to see some of the best movies out there and a must-see is "Saltburn." You might be asking what the movie is about and it is indeed a difficult one to chat about without giving too much away. It is from the brain of Emerald Fennell, the same woman responsible for that twisted dark comedy "Promising Young Woman" starring Carey Mulligan. That movie was dramatic, comedic and delivered a stunner of a surprise near the end that left me speechless.

I can tell you Fennell's follow-up, "Saltburn" is one that will have critics and movie fans talking as well, as it follows Oliver (Barry Keoghan), as an Oxford University student navigating amongst the elite. Keoghan is masterful in this performance that is nuanced, calculating, mesmerizing and twisted all at the same time. Keoghan is a bit older than what I realized, but his stature compared to his co-star Jacob Elordi helps sell the persona of him being a destitute college student.

Fennell does a superb job of immediately forcing the audience to connect with our protagonist as he struggles to fit in at a school where he is seen to be the lesser of his counterparts. While its college, it has splashes of high school, of being that kid who just wants to belong with the cool kids and you're willing to do anything to make that happen. Elordi portrays Felix Catton, the rich of the rich who is masterful in the performance. I was already aware of Elordi's talent based on his work on the risqué HBO series "Euphoria," but here he proves there is a charis-



"Saltburn" is proof that good movies are still being made.

ma he possesses that draws you to him on the screen.

Felix is indeed the object of everyone's obsession and Elordi balances that allure with a character that seems to be longing for more, let's say a genuine friendship and a family that shows actual emotion? That brings us to the film's title, which I'm always eager to learn how the title of the movie plays into the actual film itself, with "Saltburn" being the estate of the Catton family.

Oliver is coy about his upbringing and what he shares with Felix draws the friends together, and that brings an element of infatuation with a tinge of lust. Fennell's writing is so sharp at times I felt Felix was into Oliver as much as Oliver was into him, but the characters don't quite go there. The audience is teased, but the tease we receive is so strong it does make you think, could these two guys really be into each other. At Saltburn, we

meet Felix's family which includes his eccentric sister Venetia (Alison Oliver), his annoying, but intriguing cousin Farleigh (Archie Madekwe), who eats up this role. He is that bougie guy that brags about all the riches without actually having any of it at all.

There is Felix's parents Lady Elspeth Catton (Rosamund Pike) and Sir James Catton (Richard E. Grant). There is so much buzz about Pike's performance as Elspeth, and I will be honest, it was solid, but nothing that made me say WOW. It is fine acting, but I think more praise should be going to Grant and Elordi who are not even being considered as contenders for awards season, and they should be.

Fennell does some exceptional work with the camera where she stages some of the dramatic shots in a way where you know what is going on without fully getting a close up of things. I will say this,

"Saltburn" had a bevy and I mean a bevy of scenes that left me speechless and had me asking myself, "What the hell are you watching?" but in a good way. There is a level of intrigue and suspense to all these characters that just work where Fennell draws you in and before she delivers the kill you're not quite sure where things will culminate.

Keoghan's performance is critical to driving the narrative that is a slow burn, but one that I did not mind for the 2 hours a change. The pacing worked well to a point where I never got bored watching, I was always intrigued to find out what was going to unfold next. While many are calling this a dark comedy, I have to disagree, this is more like a dark drama, where you think you know what is going to happen, but as things unfold, your eyes get open a bit more and a bit more before the big climax transpires and those eyes are open in stunning shock.

Keoghan should be a contender for a Screen Actor's Guild nomination for Best Actor and I would love to see him nominated for an Oscar for his work. It would also be a travesty if Fennell is not in contention in the Best Original Screenplay race for a script that is so witty and clever and riveting you immediately get sucked into what is transpiring within the first 5 minutes of the flick. "Saltburn" is one of those movies people will be talking about the key is to be aware of what you tell those who HAVE NOT seen the movie what it is all about. Trust me you don't want to have this ending or the many twists and turns exposed before you have seen the movie yourself.

"AQUAMAN AND THE LOST KINGDOM" IS PURE FUN!

By David Miller

HOLLYWOOD—It truly sucks when a ton of critics pan a movie because they've heard early buzz from others. For almost a year I have heard nothing, but bad things about the much anticipated sequel to Warner Bros. blockbuster for "Aquaman." Well, it is here "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" and I had one hell of a fun ride. Would I say it was better than the original? No, but it was a damn satisfying sequel in my opinion.

Jason Momoa is back to portray the fish man of the sea, whose comedy has been upped just a bit for this sequel. The laughs in the first flick landed a lot better than some of the jokes in this second go around. They just felt a bit forced and that didn't work for me as a viewer. Those scenes with Momoa and his baby boy were just a tinge cringe for me, but once you get past the here's what has been happening in my life portion of the film things take off and never look back.

There was so much discussion about Amber Heard's appearance in this sequel

and people need to chill. Is Mera as potent as she was in the first flick? Absolutely not, and I will admit Heard was one of the reasons I enjoyed the first film so much to be honest. Her presence here is felt and she does solid work as the supporting wife and character as she is needed to push the narrative in the direction that it heads. However, the big standout is Patrick Wilson, as Orm. Yes, you may remember him as the villain in the 2018 flick, and his character just works so well in this sequel.

He is a scene stealer and drives so much of the narrative it would have been a treat if the reveal that Arthur aka Aquaman (Momoa) had to work with his half-brother this time around wasn't spilled or kept more of a secret because it brings an element of surprise to the movie that keeps the audience tuned in. I hate to say it I found myself rooting a bit more for Orm compared to Aquaman himself. Now the villain, Black Manta aka David Kane (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II)

isn't as captivating as Orm was in the first flick. He works, but I want my villains to feel like a threat to my hero and I felt a wink of it, but the narrative never pushed beyond that slight wink in my opinion.

Black Manta wants to punish Aquaman for killing his father in the first flick and while the revenge tale is a common motif in superhero flicks, I've just seen it done better before. It is not dismal, it just isn't spectacular. Randall Park also shines as Dr. Stephen Shin, a scientist who works for Black Manta who delivers some serious laughs in the movie and is a character that is quite fun to witness on the screen. I actually enjoyed Kordax, who is the evil spirit of the Black Trident that Black Manta gets his hands on. That villain posed a serious threat to our hero and his friends and he should have been explored just a bit more to deliver that punch to the viewer.

Director James Wan who helmed the first flick, helms the sequel and does a

wonderful job with the visuals that place the audience in an underwater palace that is captivating to watch. The action sequences are stunning and potent throughout the entire movie, so the film earns major points for not disappointing there and the fight scenes are just as detailed and visually awesome to witness on the big screen. Fans of the comic book character will love what they see, as will the adults who are taking the kids to see the movie.

Could I see a third installment in the franchise? Without a doubt and I think people need to dismiss the box-office performance and consider that the movie might have potential legs without too much hitting cinemas in the next few weeks as we truly gear up for awards season. "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" was a delightful treat where I thought I was going to be super disappointed, but I enjoyed the 2 hour plus movie that had something to entertain all ages.