

Deadpool: An anti-superhero?

Kevin Martinez
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Directed by Tim Miller, written by Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick

Breaking box office records worldwide, *Deadpool* is set to become the highest-grossing R-rated film ever made. Given that the competition was *Zoolander 2* and *How to Be Single*, the film did not have much to go up against. It has presumably struck a chord with audiences grown tired of the recent epidemic of formulaic and boring film adaptations of comic books.

That being said, *Deadpool* resembles every other comic book film that has already been made—only with more nudity, even more gratuitous violence and endless pop culture references. It is almost everything that Hollywood imagines a teenager could want from a film, as though he or she had a choice in the matter.

Our story follows Wade Wilson (Ryan Reynolds), a former special operations soldier turned mercenary, who falls for a call girl, Vanessa Carlyle (Morena Baccarin). Wilson learns he has cancer and opts to be cured by an experimental treatment that will give him superhuman abilities. But, alas, the treatment is actually designed by super-villains who want to turn Wilson into a super-soldier and their slave.

Wilson ends up escaping the villains but is horribly disfigured by the treatment and thus unable to reunite with his beloved Vanessa. He plots revenge on his tormentors and using his newfound strength and super-healing powers is able to kill a great many people while delivering one-liners and other “comic” gems.

Reynolds is a talented and amusing actor, but here he comes off as rather irritating. The humor is largely juvenile and most of it gets old after the first few minutes. Sometimes it works, as when Deadpool is about to punch an enemy, “I’m gonna do to your face what Limp Bizkit did to music in the late 90s!” Most of the time, the jokes are cheap and unfunny.

No doubt the appeal of *Deadpool* has something to do with the supposed irreverence it shows toward the

conventions of Hollywood superhero movies. On multiple occasions, Reynolds’s character breaks the proverbial “fourth wall” and addresses the audience directly. This is the first Marvel comic book intended for adults, which, as noted, means loads of gore, sex and cursing. Various swipes at the *X-Men* franchise and other films abound.

More importantly, what distinguishes this film from the rest of the crop is that Deadpool doesn’t “play by the rules,” killing and maiming “bad guys” as much as he likes. Other superheroes attempt to capture their foes alive or use their powers as a last resort, but not Deadpool. Here all inhibitions are lifted and anything goes. Where have we heard that before? Is this an advance?

Here the official culture of death and dehumanization is taken as a given. Our hero used to be in special ops in Baghdad and Mogadishu? How interesting! There is no hint of protest against anything, and the results are especially tame and weak. One sees various plot twists coming from a long distance away.

After all the explosions and four-letter words, what are we left with? A “romantic comedy” that desensitizes the mind and body. What can be more banal and dispiriting than that?

Although the creators may or may not fancy themselves as rebels who are creating a transgressive movie, *Deadpool* is nothing of the sort. It is not a critique of the existing society and actually reinforces everything retrograde in art and culture. For all its “edge,” the writers could not think of anything more intriguing than the familiar “boy meets girl” storyline, which in and of itself, of course, is not a fatal move.

Major problems arise, however, when artists accept unthinkingly the framework of unlimited war and social reaction imposed on them and do not even know what they are rebelling against, or if rebelling is even the right course of action. Director Tim Miller and the

other creators of *Deadpool* have enough ironic detachment and self-awareness to make fun of the comic book genre, but cannot offer anything of real substance.

When someone, like yours truly, points out that this is an empty work, apologists for the film fall back and respond, “Of course, it’s not serious, that’s the whole point.” The filmmakers are clever enough to be cynical, but not nearly clever enough to tell a good or important story.



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