

Movie Review: 'Fantastic Four, Rise of the Silver Surfer'

by *David_Elliott*

Like a packaged spree of trailers for itself, "Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer" also seems like a concentrated preview of July's Comic-Con, a clue that nerds, post-event, will need to lease new storage rooms.

'FANTASTIC FOUR: THE RISE OF THE SILVER SURFER' - The Silver Surfer comes to Earth to prepare it for destruction in 'The Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer.' CNS Photo courtesy of WETA. Ioan Gruffudd is back as endlessly elastic Reed Richards, top science brain of the 21st century. At his prenuptial bachelor party, he explains the big-bang theory of creation to four bimbos. One squeaks (tiny bang), "You're really smart."

Nobody should say that to writers Don Payne (down from 13 episodes of "The Simpsons") and Mark Frost (down from 30 of "Twin Peaks"). Not after their cameo groaner for Marvel Comics' legend Stan Lee, or fireball wiseguy Johnny Storm (Chris Evans) calling fans "parasites," or a huffy general (Andre Braugher) dissing "egghead" Reed with, "I bet you never played high school football, did ya?"

Michael Chiklis hulks as clay-monster-dearie Ben Grimm, doing dem-dese macho lines ripe from the "Slapsie Maxie" Rosenbloom era (early '50s). Jessica Alba is again Sue Storm, bubbly vavoom with invisibility gifts, prone to theme-park acting that will make her a fine Ophelia at Disney World, unless Paris Hilton claims that gig as community service.

Reed dreams up scientific breakthroughs and gizmos so fast that he makes Capt. Nemo seem a merit-badge flunkie. He needs to, once the Silver Surfer (Doug Jones, voiced by Laurence Fishburne) arrives, harbinger of an apocalyptic mega-blob of interstellar dust and gas, The Destroyer.

The silver guy, more like chrome, rides a surfboard that looks like gleaming mercury. His body is in the style of Mussolini Moderne: towering, metallic, nude but no genitals. In what must be imagineering, he morphs from frightful menace to soulful, lonely guy and then sacrificial Christ figure.

Destructive but curiously bloodless on every level, the movie seems meant to thrill a somewhat hyper 11-year-old boy. CGI flights and blasts and morphs go off like time-release capsules, and the wit favors sadism; when a character screams "I'm on fire!", a female bystander exults, "Human torch!"

Bopping all over the globe, the plot even creates a country, Latrevia. Between trips we must fret with the fab Four, who worry about not leading normal lives. Guys (and gal), here's a tip: Go that way and you're out of work.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) As some kind of cereal-box bonus, there is the return of villain Victor Von Doom (who could have guessed, with that name?). Julian McMahon as Victor preens like a smarmy merger of Kevin Spacey and young Robert Goulet.

The pieces plug into place, but without the escalating, party-high zest of the new "Pirates" movie. If not entirely a downer, this is no topper.

A 20th Century Fox release. Director: Tim Story. Writers: Don Payne, Mark Frost. Cast: Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba, Chris Evans, Michael Chiklis, Chris Evans, Julian McMahon. Running time: 1 hour, 31 minutes. Rated PG. 2 stars.

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