

# Movie Review: 'Venom'

NEW YORK — Whatever you do, don't call that alien who has taken up residence in your body a parasite. The polite term, it seems, is symbiote.

Such is the dubious lesson in etiquette conveyed by the sci-fi-driven, Marvel Comics-based bit of nonsense "Venom" (Columbia).

Director Ruben Fleischer's adaptation has San Francisco investigative reporter Eddie Brock (Tom Hardy) trying to get the goods on evil billionaire — is there any other kind? — Carlton Drake (Riz Ahmed).

Having made his fortune in pharmaceuticals, Drake now devotes himself, ostensibly, to advancing space exploration. His real agenda is quite different, however.

Behind the scenes, he's been experimenting with fusing human beings and extraterrestrials into a composite life form. His preferred guinea pigs are consenting, albeit less than fully informed, denizens of the city's streets. (Ooh, social relevance!)

With the help of Dr. Dora Skirth (Jenny Slate), one of Drake's researchers who's had second thoughts, Brock manages to infiltrate the tycoon's vast lab. But things quickly go awry, and he accidentally undergoes the transformation Drake has been struggling to achieve. As a result, Brock is endowed with superpowers — but he's also unable, at times, to control his own actions.

Initially bewildered, Brock eventually learns that the occupant of his body is the alien of the title. Since this being has a battle to fight with others of his kind here on Earth, expelling him will prove challenging, despite the aid Brock receives from his sympathetic ex-live-in-girlfriend, Anne Weying (Michelle Williams), and her new beau, physician Dan Lewis (Reid Scott).

There's some amusing dialogue between Brock and Venom. And believers will appreciate the fact that villainous crackpot Drake is given lines denouncing the God of the Bible and offering himself as a substitute deity.

The mayhem the otherworldly creatures wreak, moreover, though sometimes described in gruesome ways — think Hannibal Lecter and those fava beans — is virtually bloodless in terms of what's shown on screen. That's about all that can be said in the picture's favor, though. Otherwise, this is easily forgettable fare for the undemanding and, perhaps, Marvel movie completists.

The film contains much stylized violence with minimal gore, cohabitation, about a half-dozen uses of profanity, a milder oath, at least one rough term, frequent crude and occasional crass language and brief mature wordplay. The Catholic News Service classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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