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Justice League: What the Hell Are We Feeding Our Kids?

Eric · Wednesday, November 29th, 2017

I went to see *JUSTICE LEAGUE* yesterday with my 10 year old son, Exsel, and his 10 year old girl friend (not “girlfriend”, no WAY!). I felt like my parents must have felt about sex, drugs, rock ‘n roll, and the Beatles. Out of date! Mercilessly and genuinely critical. The movie was so loud, aggressive, violent, and brutal. One pumped-up, digitally animated, super hero battle scene after another. Explosions of sound and fury (signifying nothing?). Violent as all hell. Dystopian. What were these kids being exposed to? A wasteland of a future, where the bad guys had won, people lived in trailer-tenements, the land was devastated with depression and hopelessness, and the only hope left were these SUPER heroes (where at least Wonder Woman was beautiful and compassionate and The Flash was nerdy and funny).

But I hated it. Couldn’t look at the screen. I used the battle scenes to refill the giant bucket of popcorn. Yet the kids and the whole audience naturally.... loved it. Even the sweet 10 year old girl, who cries for homeless puppies and for sentimental stories, sat there mesmerized. I asked her directly, “How can you stand all the violence and battle scenes?” She answered “I LOVE the battle scenes.” What could I say?

 I knew for weeks, as Exsel kept salivating about the sacred Nov. 17 release date, that I didn’t want to go see the movie. That I would react this way. But hey, it’s Thanksgiving week; the kids are off from school the WHOLE week. Gotta do something with them! I hemmed and hawed all day, and half an hour before the 4:45 show in 3D at the Regal in downtown LA, I asked them both, “On a scale of 1-10, how much do you want to see the movie?” “Nine!” “Ten!” I was screwed. A lost battle. What was I supposed to do? Be a lousy, selfish, restrictive parent and not take them?

Hey, it’s a lousy, dis-heartening, and dysfunctional world out there. Just watch the news. Browse the internet. Or read the newspapers like I still do. (At least I can still pick and choose my poison.) Everyday there is some post, some story, some Tweet – that is not in our, we the people’s, favor. Tax reform for the rich. Health care for only those who can afford it. Hurricanes, floods, and natural disasters because climate change and global warming aren’t real. New laws, executive orders, and threatened walls against immigrants and immigration... here in the “land of the free, home of the brave”... where the Statue of Liberty is no longer a beacon of hope to the world, but more a defensive symbol of a country in decline led by a tempestuous, narcissistic, and dangerous leader.



So sure, we NEED heroes. Even superheroes. But how did we reduce the search to talented, uneducated sports figures, fatuous Hollywood celebrities, and one-dimensional comic book action heroes? Maybe because... they all allow us to exaggerate, fantacize, and project... our wishes and stifled dreams upon them. But c'mon, these "characters" are neither real, nor worthy of our praise, our devotion, or our worship. They have feet of clay and minds of mush. But I know... hero worship is our new religion, right? Has replaced the old, "true" religions. Along with the worship of money, fame, and the owning of things. That's what fills the hole. Makes us whole. What's happened to our society? I worry. What will happen to our kids?

Transcendence. The need to go beyond ourselves. To be part of something larger than ourselves. I truly believe its part of the human DNA. It's why older civilizations invented their anthropomorphic, imperfect gods. It's why Christians, Jews, and Muslims invented their one, Almighty and powerful... Oz... I mean.... God. We've done it throughout history. Searched/yearned for transcendence. Some of us do it through family, love, membership, philanthropy. I did it through "art" for many years. I felt that by making something universal out of the fabric, the microcosm, of my life, I could reach others. Affect others. Be part of others' lives. Now I have a son. I understand.

So I want to be careful. Be responsible for what I feed the boy. What I teach him. What I expose him to. I set boundaries and limits to his screen time, knowing that if I cut him off altogether, he won't know what his friends are talking about at school. But I also want him to be active, not passive. Make choices. Find his own voice. Be passionate. Make a contribution to the planet. And the problem is that I don't think that soaking up, sucking up, super hero action movies with a cast full of arrogant, self-absorbed bozos – will help him move in that direction. I worry about his dreams, his nightmares, his future... in a world that is so negative, hopeless, and full of terror (both threatened, animated, *and* real).

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Hey, I'm just an artist, an ex-theater professor. I never liked science fiction, outer space movies, or comic books (OK, Superman was cool). I didn't like Star Wars, Star Trek, Planet of the Apes, or shall I dare say it, not even 2001, A Space Odyssey. I couldn't believe them. Outer space didn't really look like that. And anyway, that's just the way my parents raised me. It's THEIR fault!

But ok, it's 2017 now, I should shape up, grow up, and just ignore all the brutality, mindlessness, & gratuitous violence in these offensive, aggressive Super Hero movies, right? I should give up "the battle", cave in and fold, right?

No way! Not me! I'm a super hero Dad. Truth, justice, and the ex-patriate American Way. Fuck these DC/Marvel conglomerate mega blockbusters. I ain't goin' anymore. Leave these soul-stultifying assaults on human consciousness to the rest of the world's hungry ghosts.

Too much popcorn gives me indigestion anyway.

As for my kid, at least he'll know where I stand... even if... it's a... losing battle.



Coda: I posted something on Facebook last week that was the kernel of what became this piece. It

got a LOT of response. Not surprisingly, characterized by age. Most of my contemporaries agreed with me. Near 100%. Lots of my former students, naturally a generation younger, told me that “not all super hero movies are the same.” They pointed me towards The Guardian movies, the new Thor movie, Marvel instead of DC movies, and of course Wonder Woman, which admittedly, I really loved as well as the rest of them. (But that was probably because a woman directed it, not a young man brought up on violence and video games.)

The comments were diverse and mega-interesting. So if you’d like to join the conversation, please go to the Facebook thread [HERE](#).

Also, please listen to my sound-immersive (but not TOO LOUD), and musically-scored, travel PODCAST, “e-travels with e. trules” by going [HERE](#).

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