



THE SUPERHERO STORY NO ONE EXPECTED

NAFIS IMTIAZ ONISH

"Unsettling" - the one word that best describes FX's new superhero TV show, Legion. The series takes place in the X-men universe. However, it is not a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, rather it abuts on the Fox-Marvel end.

Before watching the first season, I was quite sceptic of the plot. A young mutant discovers his powers with the help of a group of other mutants and soon becomes the key to ending the Humans vs. Mutants war. Sounds a lot too familiar, doesn't it? Yet, I have never been more wrong about a show. Though the starting and ending points coincide with clichéd superhero stories, everything the show offers is bewildering. The show steps away from both the formulaic "colourful, all-out action with (mostly bad) humor" of the Marvel movies and the gritty rawness of Daredevil. Legion feels more like a beautifully visualized sci-fi horror series than anything remotely related to what we expect from a superhero-based show and I was pretty creeped out in some of the parts.

Legion is a visual masterpiece by Noah Hawley, previously renowned for writing FX's other hit TV show, Fargo. The show revolves around David Haller, the son of Charles Xavier according to the comic-book origins who is a powerful mutant diagnosed with schizophrenia at a young age. He falls in love with Syd, another mutant like him, in a psychiatric hospital and with the help of Syd and her team of mutants he eventually realizes that his perceived mental illness was actually his uncontrolled psychic powers all along. Hawley has used different directing

techniques all throughout the series and the show feels like a beautiful canvas for cinematography. The shot selections, the angles, the visualization are experimental yet pitch perfect. It has sections where the aspect ratio shifts to a tighter frame when the characters snap into flashbacks or feel claustrophobic. The colours used in the scenes (mostly blue or red) reflect the nature (i.e. good or evil) of the object or event in the scenes. The best segment



hands down goes to the silent movie-styled section, that too during an important stage of the story. The characters also interestingly tend to leave out sentences incomplete during suspenseful scenes and one can clearly feel the anxiety that this phenomena presents. Such attention to detail makes a significant impact on the viewing experience.

Hence, Legion does not just feel like a show that tells you a story, it immerses you in the story, makes you feel as if you were inside their world. Hawley tried to portray David as an unreliable narrator with a distorted view of reality and the viewers can easily feel the paranoia that David goes through every episode. Stanley Kubrick's influence on Hawley is widely observed throughout the show and like Kubrick, Hawley prefers visuals over

words when it comes to story-telling.

What further transforms the amazing cinematography into an immersive experience is the ingeniously befitting soundtrack. Jeff Russo does a marvelous job at composing the perfect background score for every scene. Legion has meticulously-picked songs, the lyrics of which resonate the story of the scenes. Russo told Hawley during their first

meeting that he wanted the series to sound like Pink Floyd's The Dark Side of the Moon, explaining "that album more than anything is really the soundscape of mental illness to some degree". Russo's recreation of Maurice Ravel's "Bolero" with synthesizers is probably the most brilliant score of the series.

Apart from the technical brilliance, the story progression and pacing is really good too. It does not take too much time to develop the main characters yet it spends enough time to give the viewers a relatable backstory. The show balances out action and story-telling quite well, so every episode is an individual story with highs and lows of its own. Straight off the pilot episode, you can realize the mastery of the show and should get hooked from the very first episode. Legion uses an "Inception" styled non-linear story progression and every revelation of the story feels very enthralling yet satisfying.

Aubrey Plaza plays the role of Lenny to perfection and is undoubtedly the best character of the show. One criticism of the show is probably the less interesting side-characters. Plus, the CGI seems a bit cheap at times. However, the overall delivery of the show easily surpasses those minor drawbacks.

Legion is arguably the best superhero series till date. So, you can grab a good pair of headphones and start watching it. No matter whether you like it or not, you will surely have a unique experience unlike any other show before.

Nafis Imtiaz Onish believes grinning is the answer to everything and avidly loves art, astronomy & all things nerdy. Send him Carl Sagan fan art at nafisimtiaz17@gmail.com.