

# Boston Herald

## August 1, 2011

### Encore's 'Moby Dick' goes off the deep end

By Mark A. Perigard

Monday, August 1, 2011

**“MOBY DICK” Tonight and tomorrow at 8 p.m. on Encore. : C+**

Call me bored.

Encore's adaptation of Herman Melville's "Moby Dick," the cable network's first original miniseries, is about as thrilling as a three-hour tour of Boston Harbor while blindfolded on a sweltering summer day.

William Hurt ("The Accidental Tourist") stars as the obsessed, peg-legged Captain Ahab, and that problematic casting almost sinks the miniseries before it sets sail from 1850 Nantucket. (Each installment runs about 95 minutes — set your DVR accordingly, if you must.)

Screenwriter Nigel Williams takes some liberties with Melville's classic, particularly in his decision to depict Ahab's home life, only alluded to in the novel. (Melville was born on this day back in 1819.)

Gillian Anderson ("The X-Files") keeps her head lowered and wrings her hands as Ahab's long-suffering wife Elizabeth. She'd be afraid of her tub, never mind the open sea.

"He isn't just another whale, is he?" she says of Moby, who tore off Ahab's leg in their first encounter. "He went for you, didn't he? They don't do that, do they? It isn't natural," she says, sounding like a jealous wife. As well she should be.

Donald Sutherland ("Dirty Sexy Money") is promoted as a co-star but only cameos as a minister. Both he and Anderson vanish once the Pequod slips the shore.

Ahab's dialogue treads on Melville's questions about God, free will and predestination. "Our freedom lies in the struggle to escape what fate has laid down for us," he says. Hurt's delivery suggests he's reading from a Teleprompter.

First mate Starbuck (Ethan Hawke, "Training Day") is the lone dissenter to Ahab's increasingly insane mission to bring down the mighty Moby. As Ishmael, Charlie Cox's naivete turns him into a 19th-century Gilligan.

As in the novel, there are digressions into the ship's rhythm and business that easily could have been cut to make this a shipshape 90-minute adventure.

For those viewers who stick out the dog paddle of a drama on the Pequod, the whale's infrequent appearances — the final moments tonight and then the climax of tomorrow's episode — almost make the interminable rocking of the boat worthwhile.

"Moby Dick — just saying it is enough to scare the hell out of a man," Ahab says.

Taking a cue from the original "Jaws," director Mike Barker teases the behemoth's appearances. Often just a glimpse of him skimming beneath the surface of the water is frightening.

When he finally emerges from the waters at the close of tonight's episode, he is a fearsome sight, rendered in impressive CGI. In one great shot tomorrow, with a slap of his tail, the whale wipes out one fishing vessel and its crew.

The miniseries' finale, with the leviathan attacking like God's mighty fist personified against the vainglorious Ahab and his hapless crew, honors Melville's horrific vision.

The voyage, however, hardly seems worth the destination.

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