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Whale war

Hurt, Hawke lead assault on "Mody Dick"

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"Moby Dick" Monday at 8 p.m. on Encore



In 1956, John Huston turned "Moby Dick," one of the greatest American novels ever written, into possibly the greatest philosophical action-adventure movie ever filmed. So it was with great trepidation that I popped in the advance screener for Encore's first original movie, an adaptation of "**Moby Dick**," starring William Hurt as Captain Ahab. With over 30 *million* subscribers, Encore doesn't *have* to go into the original movie business. But hey -- everyone wants to be a producer.

Why, oh why, anyone remakes perfection I don't know, but they always do. I wish they'd remake movies that should have been great but were dogs, like "The Bonfire of the Vanities" and "The Great Gatsby."



Raoul Trujillo, Ethan Hawke, Eddie Marsan and Charlie Cox (left to right) co-star in "Moby Dick," an Encore miniseries premiering Monday night.

At any rate, Encore is starting with a classic that is impossible to top -- and they've done a pretty decent job of it.

If you're not a purist, and are looking for a more modern take on the classic tale, Encore's "Moby Dick" *is* in fact, surprisingly worth your time. OK, not as much time as they take to do it, (two 90-minute segments on separate nights), but most of it is quite watchable.

Early in the movie we meet Ishmael (Charlie Cox), who rescues a little slave boy, Pip (Daniyah Ysrayl), by merely grabbing him up on his wagon from the mean slave master who is beating the child. Apparently in Alabama it wasn't a crime to steal a slave because no one chases them. Don't ask.

This gives way to Ishmael finally uttering the opening line of the book, "Call me Ishamel." No, Ishamel is no longer the narrator; here he is the second-banana protagonist.

Hurt chews up the scenery with the same ferocity that the massive whale, Moby Dick, used on Ahab's leg. Ethan Hawke as Starbuck is reduced to a big complainer. Ishmael here is an innocent who, along with Queequeg (Raoul Trujillo), is in cahoots with the mad Ahab -- while the comical, inspirational shipmate Stubb (Eddie Marsan) is, in this adaptation, turned bizarrely into a sadist who gets great pleasure in flogging dying seamen.

Dopey? Yes. But the action scenes are terrifically exciting and very well done, and Hawke does his damndest to survive the overacting of Hurt *and* the underacting of Cox, who is so wooden he should be the one hobbling around on that wooden stump.

"Thar she blows?" No. Lots of fun.

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