

## Blu-Ray Review: 50th Anniversary Edition of ‘Spartacus’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 1, 2010 - 2:04pm

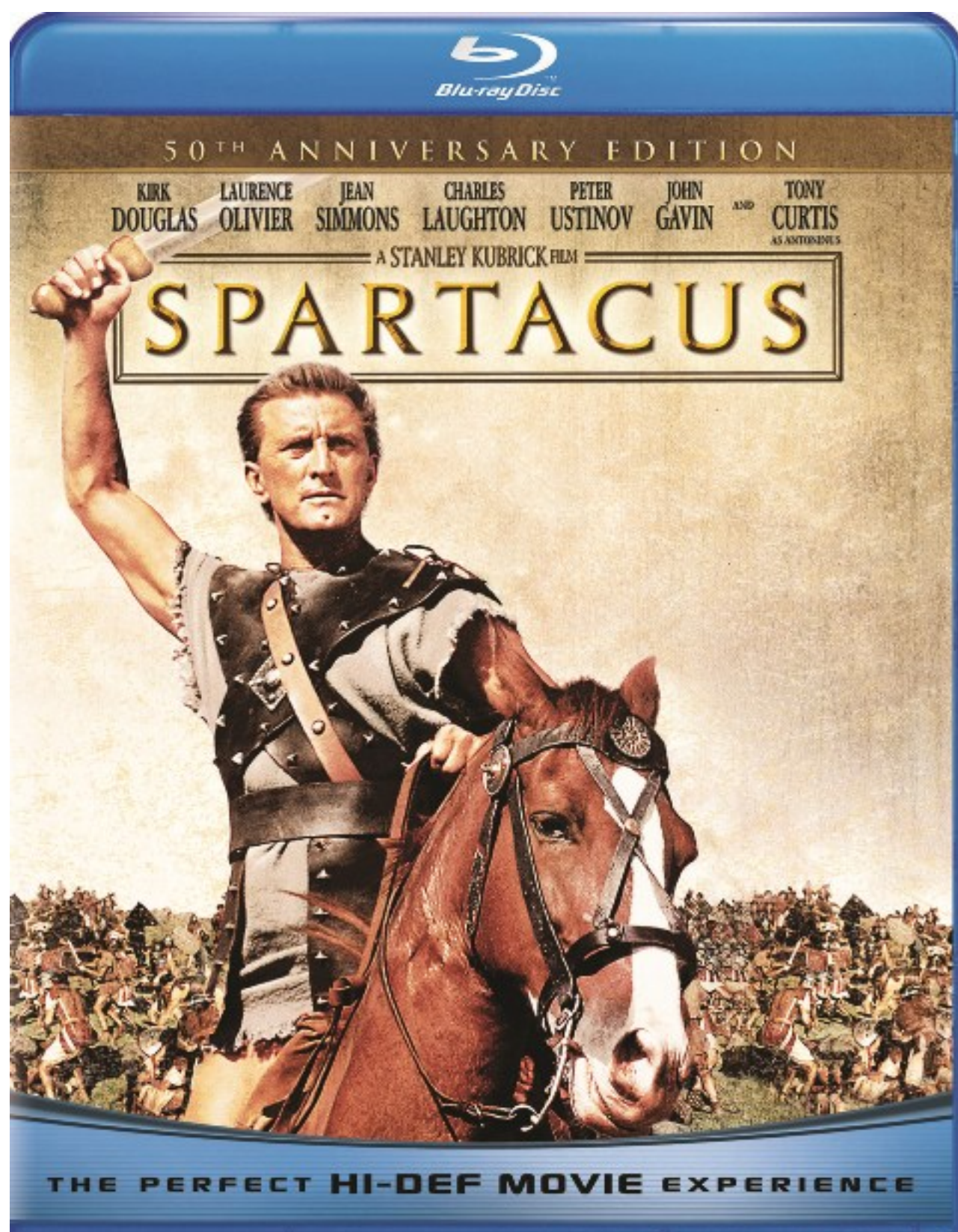
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CHICAGO – I think nearly every film critic with an association card has bowed at the altar of Stanley Kubrick at least once in their life (if they don’t still do so). I can vividly remember first seeing “2001: A Space Odyssey,” “The Shining,” “A Clockwork Orange,” “Dr. Strangelove,” and “Full Metal Jacket,” all films I could watch any day of the week and never grow tired of them. Despite saying that, I was never a huge “Spartacus” fan, a film I admire more than love. The new Blu-ray release has not changed my mind.



Blu-Ray Rating: **4.0/5.0**

The 50th Anniversary Edition of “Spartacus” has caused quite a bit of controversy in the days preceding and since its May 25th release. Robert Harris, the man credited with the film’s restoration on a shot by shot basis twenty years ago with the support of Kirk Douglas and Stanley Kubrick, absolutely hates this HD transfer, going as far as to suggest a recall. He [wrote](#) [17] “It has been turned, on this Blu-ray, into a sideshow pipsqueak, an ugly and unfortunate bit of home video fodder, which would be far better suited to VHS.”



Spartacus: 50th Anniversary Edition was released on Blu-ray on May 25th, 2010

Photo credit: Universal

Harris is mostly upset about what has happened to several catalog Blu-rays in recent years — an over-polishing that notoriously made George C. Scott in “Patton” look about as flawed as a Ken doll. As more and more classic films are released in HD, we’re learning that there’s a lot of wiggle room in Universal’s claim to “Perfect Picture and Purest Digital Sound Available”. What exactly is “Perfect Picture”? We’d all agree that a photograph can be airbrushed too much, so can’t a film be too “perfect”? I absolutely think that many classic films have been remastered to the point that their creator’s original intent was muddled. Not everything is supposed to look “perfect”.

It is with this hesitation that I popped in “Spartacus” and can now see both sides of the argument but recommend the Blu-ray. First, I think Harris is overreacting a bit and that the film looks (mostly) great. Watched comfortably on a couch in the way that most people will experience it, “Spartacus” is not a Blu-ray that I would include alongside “Patton” or “Dirty Harry,” two films notoriously over-polished.

However, if you look very closely and are warned about Harris’ response then it’s easy to see what he’s talking about in a few key scenes. But the fact is that most people aren’t NEARLY as familiar as Harris with the film and are likely to enjoy the film more in this presentation than any previously released. It definitely captures Kubrick’s incredible ability to stage enormous, influential sequences and the epic scope of the piece. If you love “Spartacus,” you won’t be disappointed. If you’re obsessed with it to the point that you’ll notice when a character’s skin tone doesn’t look quite the same as the previous hundred times you watched it, then you may want to stick with the DVD.

As for the film itself and the special features, the former has held up remarkably well (as most Kubrick films have) and the special features are copious and informative, but does not include nearly the scope of the ones available on the Criterion release (which I certainly would NEVER discard in favor of this one in terms of picture or bonus material). It turns out that the 50th birthday of “Spartacus” really only merits a new transfer and audio track. And some people may want to return the gifts.

#### Special Features:

- o Deleted Scenes
- o Archival Interviews with Peter Ustinov and Jean Simmons
- o Behind-the-Scenes Footage
- o 5 Vintage Newsreels
- o Image Galleries, including Production Stills, Concept Art, Costume Designs, Storyboards, Posters and Print Ads



*'Spartacus: 50th Anniversary Edition' is released by Universal and stars Kirk Douglas, Laurence Olivier, Jean Simmons, Charles Laughton, Peter Ustinov, John Gavin, and Tony Curtis. It was written by Dalton Trumbo and directed by Stanley Kubrick. It was released on May 25th, 2010 and is rated PG-13.*



[18]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [19]  
Content Director  
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://HollywoodChicago.com)  
[brian@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com) [18]

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