

Blu-Ray Review: 'Green Lantern: Emerald Knights' Explores DC Universe

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on June 14, 2011 - 7:46am

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CHICAGO – Superheroes may appear relatively sure-footed, but they are on shaky ground with modern audiences. The sense of awe evoked so effortlessly in Richard Donner's 1978 classic "Superman" is practically impossible to pull off these days. Comic book adaptations have to be entrenched in realism (as in "The Dark Knight") to truly wow audiences. Fantastical superpowers and pure-hearted morality just seem so passé.

It's unclear whether Martin Campbell's upcoming reboot of DC's "Green Lantern" franchise will follow in line with the Marvel series, which has uneasily melded self-referential humor with its hokey fantasy (with the exception of the first "Iron Man"). Filmmakers can't act hipper than the material and still expect audiences to sit through it. Hopefully Campbell's film will have some semblance of the spirit so vibrantly evoked in DC's latest original movie, "Green Lantern: Emerald Knights."



Fans of comics and animation alike are sure to be delighted and occasionally dazzled by this collection of shorts that illustrate key moments in the lives of various "Lantern" heroes, including the gruff yet lovable Kilowog (nicely voiced by Henry Rollins), the suavely handsome Hal Jordan (Nathan Fillion) and his predecessor, Abin Sur (Arnold Vosloo). Viewers unfamiliar with the "Lantern" series may be surprised to learn that it contains much more than one central hero. Turns out any creature in the universe can become a Lantern as long as they possess a "power ring" and unbreakable willpower. This movie could've easily been little more than a glorified marketing gimmick, but directors Chris Berkeley, Lauren Montgomery and Jay Oliva have assembled an excellent group of longtime comic artists (including Dave Gibbons, Alan Burnett and Peter Tomasi) to write the film's various segments, giving each of them a distinctive style and personality. The only scenes that don't really work are the ones that serve as bridges between the stories. Nervous recruit Arisia (voiced by Elisabeth Moss as if she's reading a children's book) spends the whole time making glib one-liners while learning about the histories of legendary Lanterns. Thankfully, every diversion is worth the trip.



Nathan Fillion voices Hal Jordan in DC's original movie Green Lantern: Emerald Knights.

Photo credit: Warner Home Entertainment

I wouldn’t dream of spoiling the twist in “Mogo Doesn’t Socialize,” a tale well-known to “Lantern” fans superbly retold by Gibbons, and featuring a vocal performance by Roddy Piper that I found quite funny (he shouts his name, “Bol-Phung-Gah” as if it were a battle cry unto itself). Also amusing is the relationship between Kilowog and his beastly drill sergeant Deegan (Wade Williams), who “trains” his soldiers by hurling them into a volcano. I will admit, however, that his tireless preference for the word “poozer” got on my nerves (I kept hoping he would borrow from the R. Lee Ermey slang-book). But like practically every character in the picture, Deegan is treated like a credible being as opposed to an eccentric oddity, and his rich personality continually shines through. Far and away the best segment of them all centers on Laira Omoto (Kelly Hu), a fiery Lantern who returns to her home planet of Jayd to find citizens needlessly slaughtered by her own family (who rules the globe with a blood-stained fist). Though her father argues that the creatures were killed because of their sinister nature, Laira insists that it’s “wrong to attack enemies without provocation.” Their exquisitely choreographed fight scene takes on an added poignance, as hologram images project memories of their blissfully happy past.



Green Lantern: Emerald Knights was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on June 7, 2011.

Photo credit: Warner Home Entertainment

“Green Lantern: Emerald Knights” is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.78:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, Spanish and French audio tracks, and includes a DVD and digital copy of the film. There are times when the feature length commentary from DC Comics Chief Creative Officer Geoff Johns and co-publisher Dan DiDio threatens to become an 84-minute pitching session. The close collaborators are clearly crossing their fingers that the upcoming Ryan Reynolds vehicle will assist in making the sprawling “Lantern” franchise relevant to a new generation. Johns played a big role in shifting focus from the singular character of Kyle Rayner to the Green Lantern Corps itself, while exploring the key theme of overcoming fear. A 31-minute dissection of the corps includes insights from UCLA professor Dr. Benjamin Karney, who discusses the psychology of bravery, and even explains cognitive dissonance. The most enlightening featurette is the 18-minute “Why Green Lantern Matters,” which reveals the origins of Hal Jordan, whose character was originally reflective of the space race. Johns’ desire to make the “Lantern” series a mixture of “Lord of the Rings” and “Star Wars” may sound overly ambitious, but these special features further illustrate the wealth of colorful heroes that could easily receive their own spin-off.

Rounding out the extras are two brief cartoon excerpts picked by executive producer Bruce Timm, vignettes on the complex biographies of Laira and Abin Sur, and a virtual comic book, which is too small to appreciate on anything other than a super-large plasma screen. There are also extended sneak peeks at the latest animated incarnations of DC’s two most legendary creations. “All-Star Superman” looks fairly straightforward, but “Batman: Year One” looks genuinely intriguing, since it’s an adaptation of the hugely influential, brutally raw comic book by Frank Miller, which was a clear precursor of Christopher Nolan’s audaciously realistic approach to the material.

‘Green Lantern: Emerald Knights’ is released by Warner Home Entertainment and stars Nathan Fillion, Jason Isaacs, Elisabeth Moss, Kelly Hu, Arnold Vosloo, Henry Rollins, Wade Williams and Roddy Piper. It was written by Eddie Berganza, Alan Burnett, Todd Casey, Dave Gibbons, Michael Green, Marc Guggenheim, Geoff Johns and Peter Tomasi and directed by Chris Berkeley, Lauren Montgomery and Jay Oliva. It was released on June 7, 2011. It is rated PG.



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