

TV Review: B-Movie Take on Legendary Hero Thrills in Starz's Bloody Hit 'Spartacus: Vengeance'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 27, 2012 - 11:53am

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CHICAGO – “*Let us split darkness with the cries of Romans.*” Boobs, blood, and betrayal — “Spartacus” must be back. Following up on the action of the beloved “Spartacus: Blood and Sand” and coming on the heels of the most critical acclaim in the history of the network (“Boss”), Starz hopes to keep momentum going with the well-made if ridiculous “Spartacus: Vengeance.” The long-awaited season premiere, airing tonight, January 27th, 2012, works as it should, not changing the formula too drastically from season one and delivering “300”-esque thrills on Friday nights.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

What most fans of “Spartacus” will want to know is simple — How does Liam McIntyre fill the big sandals of the tragically-departed Andy Whitfield (who passed away from cancer last September)? The good news is that the new Spartacus is cut from the same mold. McIntyre is a square-jawed alpha male, the kind of guy that one can easily believe would have people follow him into battle. He is charismatic and engaging, a very solid lead for a show like this one. I think Whitfield was one of the strengths of “Blood and Sand,” but it’s a testament to McIntyre’s skill that I almost immediately got used to the idea of a new Spartacus.



Spartacus: Vengeance

Photo credit: Starz

The title this season says it all. Batiatus is dead and Spartacus and his freed gladiators are on the run. Sort of. They're hidden underground, trying to stay out of the eye of the power structure looking for their heads, but also clearly in search of vengeance. Do you flee from the powerful force that has destroyed your life once you gain freedom or do you turn around and enact revenge? Such is the question at the heart of "Spartacus: Vengeance" and it makes for strong storytelling. Great swords-and-sandals fiction has always pivoted on issues relatable to modern man — most typically, vengeance as in "Gladiator" and "300" — and the writers of "Spartacus: Vengeance" understand the need to not weigh their piece down in too much period melodrama. At its core, it's a show about a leader of exiled men forced to reconcile his need for vengeance with a role that requires he doesn't get the few people left on his side killed.



Spartacus: Vengeance
Photo credit: Starz

A few familiar faces return from "Blood and Sand" (and even the prequel "Gods of the Arena") along with some new ones including the great Lucy Lawless as Lucretia Batiatus, Peter Mensah as Oenomaus, Manu Bennett as Crixus, Katrina Law as Mira, Viva Bianca as Ilithyia, Craig Parker as Gaius Claudius Glaber, and Dustin Clare as Gannicus. Lawless steals the piece whenever she's on the screen. She's so completely committed to the lunacy of her character that she's riveting. As for the rest, they're a mixed bag. Some over-act but that can often be right for the material. Bianca and Clare make the biggest impact in the premiere.

If one looks too deeply at individual elements of "Spartacus: Vengeance" on a critical level, it kind of falls apart. The sheer number of slow-motion sex or violence shots would make B-movie icons cry foul. It is so far over the top that it can't even see it any more and yet the writers take it as seriously as Shakespeare. The season premiere features such a ludicrous orgy scene (featuring wine being poured on people and more skin than you would usually see in an entire Skinemax movie) that one has to admire the producers for refusing to hold anything back in an attempt to entertain their audience. A man who is about to orgasm has a knife shoved through his throat from behind. Put the kids to bed before this one.

The sheer audacity of "Vengeance" is somewhat admirable. It's difficult to come down on some of the wooden line delivery of a few of the actors or the dialogue which seems even thinner and more expository than last year (everyone explains what they're doing and why they're doing it to the nth degree) because it's not what really matters here. It's not a coincidence that a Roman leader bemoans the lack of quality fighters in his arena because he is concerned that a dearth of blood-soaked entertainment will allow the audience to realize that their lives are increasingly troubled. We need better fighters to distract from real life. "Spartacus: Vengeance" is a better fighter.

"Spartacus: Vengeance" stars Liam McIntyre, Lucy Lawless, Peter Mensah, Manu Bennett, Katrina Law, Viva Bianca, Craig Parker, and Dustin Clare. It premieres on Starz on January 27th, 2012 at 9pm CST.



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