

Blu-ray Review: Tarsem's 'Immortals' Stages Overwrought Tedium of the Titans

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on March 21, 2012 - 8:42am

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CHICAGO – Franchise-churning Hollywood has become so desperate to launch a bankable series every month that it's now resigned to scouring the past for material, from oft-told faerie tales and outdated fantasy novels to familiar mythological figures. The premise of "Immortals" sounds like the spawn of an especially cynical business deal ("It's Greek myths meets '300!'"), and results in a picture as dull and forgettable as the "Clash of the Titans" remake.

What a better place we would be if Zack Snyder's pompous and soulless graphic novel adaptation "300" hadn't turned into a box office smash. Since 2006, audiences have had to endure an unending succession of films and TV shows that stage slow-mo battles against an entirely digital backdrop. The high levels of ultra-violence fail to leave an ounce of impact, since everything on the screen is so aggressively artificial. "Immortals" is little more than the latest cinematic equivalent of an interminable video game.



Blu-ray Rating: **1.5/5.0**

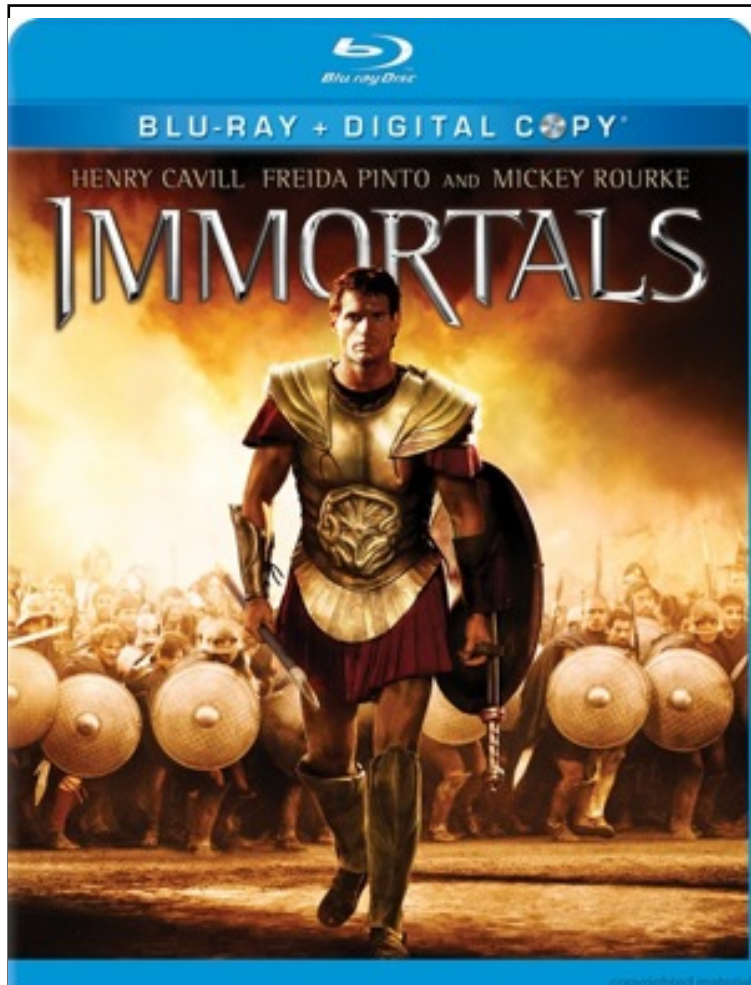
Henry Cavill (soon to be headlining Snyder's "Man of Steel") stars as Theseus, a well-built but hopelessly bland villager chosen by the Greek gods to defeat the evil King Hyperion (Mickey Rourke). It's flat-out painful to see Rourke reduced to playing snarly cardboard villains so soon after his revelatory, Oscar-nominated turn in 2008's "The Wrestler." Rourke is required to either mumble in the darkness like a low-rent Colonel Kurtz or bark out cheap one-liners, all the while feverishly munching on something before spitting it out. Perhaps he was eating his own pride. Anyway, Theseus sets out to retrieve the ancient MacGuffin known as the Epirus Bow) with the aid of an ethereal oracle (Freida Pinto, who else?) and a leering quipster (Stephen Dorff). These characters are all instantly recognizable archetypes devoid of any engaging personality. It's as if Hollywood screenwriters are comfortable in relying on clichés when dusting off such archaic subject matter, thinking that their very presence will be intrinsically engaging to to audience members. "John Carter" made the same mistake by constructing a \$250 million blockbuster around a protagonist that was essentially a muscular void. No matter how many snazzy effects are thrown at audiences, the lack of a compelling story is guaranteed to snuff out any possible human interest. Yet the extravagant backdrops and visual razzle-dazzle prove to be just as hollow and lifeless as the characters themselves.



Henry Cavill stars in Tarsem Singh Dhandwar's Immortals.

Photo credit: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment

There is exactly one good shot in the entire film that I'll admit is rather memorable. It takes place in an epilogue where a wide-eyed boy envisions an epic battle unfolding in the heavens. A dizzying sea of figures hurtle through the sky as the camera pulls back, resulting in a shot that resembles a chaotic wall painting from the Renaissance. The director, Tarsem Singh Dhandwar (often credited by his first name), has perviously been successful in making films that were immensely entertaining simply because of their stunningly abstract imagery, such as his poetic and chilling 2006 effort, "The Fall." But in "Immortals," Tarsem tones down the bizarreness of his signature style while applying it to mediocre material that is far beneath an artist of his caliber. This is clearly the work of a visionary who has lost all sense of narrative vision. The film just sits there for a monotonous 110 minutes, as the audience sits detached and numbed by the cartoonish bloodletting in scene after scene. I also found myself rather amused by the ridiculous costumes, which appear to have been the work of Queen Amidala's personal designer. Rourke's formidable screen presence is neutered by his character's silly helmet comprised of rabbit ears and a giant gaping mouth of thorny teeth. Perhaps it will be a good move for Tarsem to tackle material devoid of such ponderous self-seriousness in his next picture, "Mirror Mirror," which aims to capture the tongue-in-cheek charm of "The Princess Bride." Of course, it won't be the last "Snow White" adaptation released this year.



Immortals was released on Blu-ray and DVD on March 6, 2012.

Photo credit: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment

"Immortals" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and French audio tracks and is available in a three-disc combo pack featuring the Blu-ray 3D version of the film. Special features include a standard assortment of featurettes where cast and crew members pay lip service to the film's supposedly bold approach to archaic material. One plucky young actor applauds the film for casting young, photogenic stars to inhabit roles traditionally played by old men in white beards, as if that commercial calculation was somehow audacious. Everything from the stunts and score to the film's origins in Greek mythology are covered. What's conspicuously lacking here is any thorough discussion of Tarsem's visual palette, which is perhaps the only element in the picture worthy of analysis.

Advanced pre-visualization technology was utilized during production, enabling Tarsem to build elaborate digital environments on the spot. It must've been especially hard for actors playing the gods to keep a straight face during shooting, since their costumes look even more ridiculous against a blue screen, as witnessed in the disc's forgettable series of deleted scenes. John Hurt delivers nice work in an alternate opening that depicts young Theseus as a mocked outsider, complete with a nasty shot where he bites off a bully's ear (is he a budding god or a mere successor to Tyson?). Tarsem admits that he embraced "Immortals" as his opportunity to enter the mainstream, but his efforts have resulted in the sort of visual feast that leads swiftly to indigestion.

'Immortals' is released by Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment and stars Henry Cavill, Freida Pinto, Stephen Dorff, Mickey Rourke, Luke Evans and John Hurt. It was written by Charley and Vlas Parlapanides and directed by Tarsem Singh Dhandwar. It was released on March 13, 2012. It is rated R.



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