Blu-ray Review: ‘Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows’ Offers Nothing New

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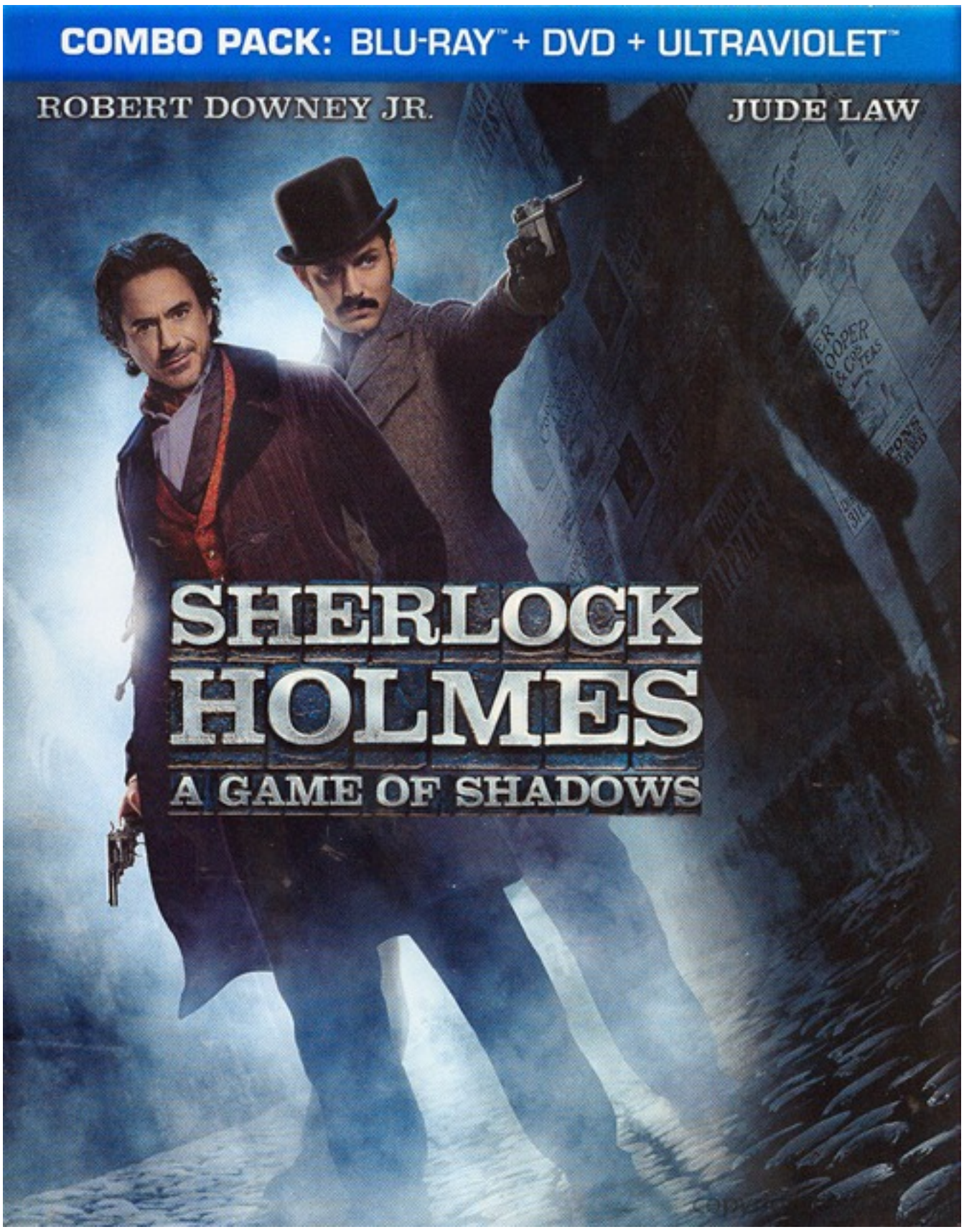
CHICAGO – Now that BBC’s acclaimed “Sherlock” has offered the definitive version of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s beloved detective, Guy Ritchie’s routine “Holmes” franchise looks all the more elementary in comparison. No amount of trademark mugging from leading man Robert Downey Jr. can compensate for the overwhelming hollowness of this slickly edited series.

Since Holmes is always fifteen steps ahead of the viewer, there’s little suspense in watching him solve every crime in sight. What made Ritchie’s 2009 predecessor a halfway appealing lark was its odd couple chemistry between the ace detective and his oft-exasperated sidekick, Watson (a game Jude Law). He is to Holmes what Pepper Pots was to Tony Stark in 2008’s “Iron Man.” The original “Holmes” may have failed as a thriller, but as a rollicking buddy comedy, it was rather infectious.



Blu-ray Rating: **2.5/5.0**

“A Game of Shadows” is no more or no less successful than the previous picture. People who already loved Ricthie’s hyper-stylized approach are guaranteed to love the sequel. If you felt ambivalent about the first “Holmes,” as I did, you’re not bound to feel much different the second time around. That’s a shame, since the script by Michele and Kieran Mulroney sets up a formidable showdown between Holmes and his equally brilliant arch enemy, Prof. James Moriarty (played to icy perfection by Jared Harris). In the first film, Ritchie deconstructed the choreography of Holmes’ bare-knuckled brawls before they unfolded in real time. The audience got to see Holmes’ meticulous mental preparation of every movement before he dove headfirst into the fight. It was a nifty trick and a rare case in which Ritchie’s visual excess served the story. With his formidable intellect, Moriarty is able to match Holmes pre-meditated move for pre-meditated move. This could’ve resulted in a fascinating battle of wits, but Ritchie is more interested in flashy camera angles than cleverly calculated jousts. Like many sequences in the film, Holmes and Moriarty’s climactic duel drifts quickly into murky incoherence, resulting in a non-resolution designed to keep the lucrative narrative machine chugging along indefinitely.



Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows was released on Blu-ray and DVD on June 12, 2012.
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

The film’s other big disappointment is its misuse of Noomi Rapace, the riveting actress who memorably portrayed Lisbeth Salander in the Swedish film adaptations of Stieg Larsson’s “Millennium” series. Her role as Holmes’ deadly female counterpart (an abrupt replacement for Rachel McAdams) could’ve served as a terrific pre-“Prometheus” launching pad for Rapace’s career in America. Alas, the role is hopelessly lackluster, merely requiring Rapace to dart her head back and forth as Holmes and Watson maintain their endless bickering. Of course, their verbal sparring is the most diverting thing in the film, and there’s a particularly funny moment when Holmes awakens a hungover Watson with the torturous sound of bagpipes. There are times when one expects Watson to blurt out, “Well, this is another fine mess you’ve gotten us into!” in pure Oliver Hardy fashion. It’s a funny relationship, but it’s not enough to sustain audience interest over two hours. Ritchie is only interested in games of the visually synthetic variety. He piles on the slow-mo effects during a protracted chase through the woods that’s as unpleasant and whiplash-inducing as any scene filmed by Zack Snyder. Downey Jr. has repeatedly proven to be a gifted chameleon, but if he continues to take inflated paychecks for phoning in the same crowd-pleasing mannerisms, he’ll end up no duller than Captain Jack Sparrow.

“Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows” is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.4:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, French and Spanish audio tracks, and includes Blu-ray, DVD and Ultraviolet versions of the film, as well as a free interactive movie app. Warner’s Maximum Movie Mode includes the standard array of behind-the-scenes footage and focus point featurettes, none of which are particularly insightful. Yet host Downey Jr.’s casual string of quips are pleasant enough to sit through. The commentary track may not be as satisfying as a full plate of Shawarma, but it’ll do.

‘Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows’ is released by Warner Home Video and stars Robert Downey Jr., Jude Law, Jared Harris, Noomi Rapace, Stephen Fry and Rachel McAdams. It was written by Michele and Kieran Mulroney and directed by Guy Ritchie. It was released on June 12, 2012. It is rated PG-13.

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