

Blu-ray Review: 'The Sorcerer and the White Snake' Succumbs to Silliness

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CHICAGO – “The Sorcerer and the White Snake” is a title that suggests the sort of tall tale that would entrance a crowd of scouts around a camp fire. It’s chockfull of fantastical creatures and action-packed setpieces, but its shoddy special effects cause it to fall short of pure enchantment. As for the story itself, it’s pure silliness.

Jet Li receives top-billing solely because he happens to be Jet Li, but he could hardly be considered the main character. This is primarily a star-crossed romance between a good-hearted physician, Xu Xian (Raymond Lam), who unwittingly falls in love with a demonic snake that takes the form of a seductive woman (Eva Huang). Their love appears to be genuine, especially after the snake saves his life, but master monk Abott Fahai (played by a bored Li) won’t allow such an outlandish union to take place, inspiring gloriously silly dialogue like, “You married a thousand-year-old snake demon!”



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

Though “Sorcerer” threatens to take the form of a “love conquers all” melodrama, that ultimately turns out to be a red herring. We’re apparently supposed to root for Li’s morose monk, who expects everyone to conform to tradition rather than pursue their dreams. He fully expects his hapless sidekick, Neng Ren (Zhang Wen), to remain his slave for the entirety of his life rather than rise to the cherished position of temple abbot. What the picture really seems to be about is a fear of intimacy felt by celibate men who cloak themselves in holy garments, praying to avoid temptation in all its forms. It’s no coincidence that every demon in the film takes the form of a woman. The lesson here, kids, is that women aren’t to be trusted and sex only leads to heartache. If the film were meant to be taken seriously, then it could easily be deemed offensive to any viewer who believes that women are indeed not the root of all evil. But it’s impossible to take a frame of this riotously childish mess seriously. The PG-13 rating is misleading since this is basically a children’s film with a dismal downer of an ending. Some of the major effects sequences are thrillingly original, while others are weirdly derivative (the climax manages to rip off the teaser trailer for Roland Emmerich’s “2012,” as giant waves flood a mountain range while being witnessed by a solemn, bell-ringing monk).



The Sorcerer and the White Snake was released on Blu-ray and DVD on April 9th, 2013.

Photo credit: Magnolia Home Entertainment

The performances by Lam and Huang are touching enough to make us care about their romance, which makes Li's indifference an increasing frustration. Yet whenever Huang transforms into a large, white snake, the effects are so terrible that the picture instantly collapses. The same can be said of Huang's Disney-esque animal companions, who speak in squeaky voices and manage to look even more cartoonish than Cinderella's squadron of mice. Perhaps the most surreal moment of the entire picture occurs when an animated rabbit hops up to Huang and warns her against sharing her "vital essences," which sound disconcertingly like the "precious bodily fluids" obsessed over by Gen. Ripper in "Dr. Strangelove." I suppose the biggest problem with "Sorcerer" is that it seems destined to satisfy no one. It'll leave kids depressed and adults transfixed on the minute hands of their watches.

"The Sorcerer and the White Snake" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Mandarin audio tracks, and includes four underwhelming featurettes that consist of wordless behind-the-scenes footage.

'The Sorcerer and the White Snake' is released by Magnolia Home Entertainment and stars Raymond Lam, Eva Huang, Jet Li, Charlene Choi and Zhang Wen. It was written by Zhang Tan, Tsang Kan-Cheong and Szeto Cheuk-Hon and directed by Siu-Tung Ching. It was released on April 9th, 2013. It is rated PG-13.



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