

Channing Tatum, Roman Empire Land in ‘The Eagle’

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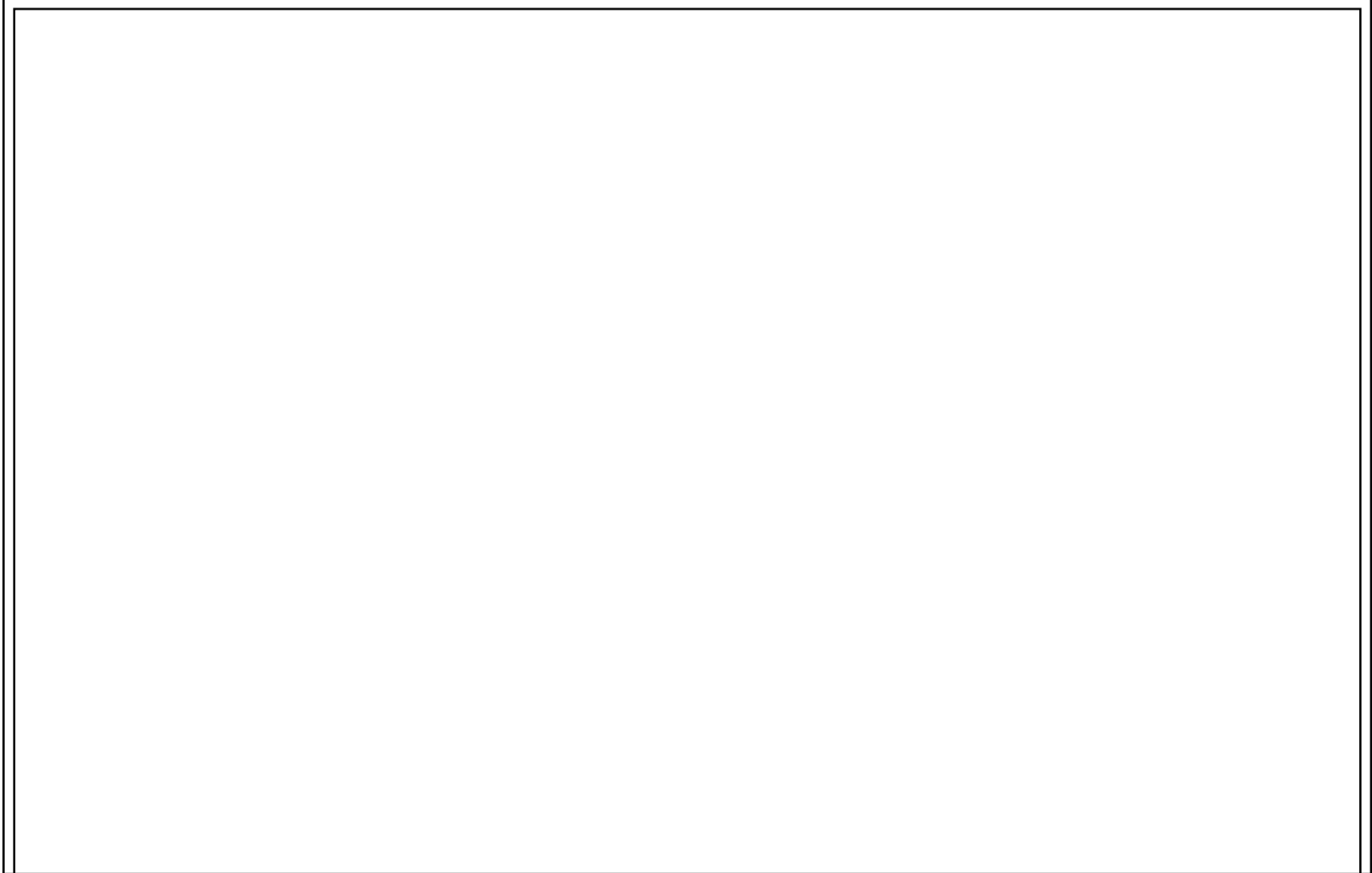


CHICAGO – In ancient times, history was at the end of a sword point and edge of the world. “The Eagle” tells of a Roman Empire battle in those times, and Channing Tatum plays a general bent on restoring his family name.

This is rousing war and adventure tale, with a quest not unlike the holy grail. With all of the actors speaking the king’s English, except for the villains, this is an old-fashioned sword and sandal epic that bases itself in actual events, in a transition for a once-mighty kingdom.

Channing Tatum is Marcus Aquila, a general of the Roman army assigned to the outlands of the empire, where England is now. His father had previously invaded the Highlands with the Ninth Legion to conquer the rest of the isle, and was met with an opposing force that not only defeated them, but captured the powerful symbol of the empire’s might, a golden eagle. Marcus has trained to avenge his father’s name, and proves his mettle with the first battle.

Injured in the fray, he meets his Uncle (Donald Sutherland), whose job is to nurse him back to health. His recovery is fraught with guilt, feeling that he had failed in completing the reason why he took the assignment in the first place. The tide turns when he refuses to allow an English slave named Esca (Jamie Bell) to die in a tournament, and takes him under his own rule. Marcus formulates a plan to take Esca as an escort back to the Highlands, beyond a wall that Rome has designated as the “end of the world.” He will recapture The Eagle.





Enemy Mine: Tahar Rahim (left), Jamie Bell (center) and Channing Tatum in ‘The Eagle’
Photo credit: Kevin Bernstein for Focus Features

Esca and Marcus travel over the dangerous territory, and begin to discover the secrets of the lost Ninth Legion, as well as what happened to Marcus’ father. The danger increases as they get closer within The Highlands, encountering a warrior tribe that desires to completely destroy the Roman influence on their land. The result of the encounter has consequences for history.

The beauty of ancient history is that it feels and looks like an alien world, and credit to the overall production for permeating the atmosphere with a authentic gravity for the times. Channing Tatum appropriately embodies the embittered son, taking on a Dark Knight-like revenge factor into his soul. With his chiseled jawline and rendered nipples on his armor, it’s not too far from Wayne Manor.

The supporting cast help create the universe as well. Donald Sutherland, with his exact Roman beard, exudes the authority of the elder over his young nephew. Jamie Bell as Esca plays his loyalty to his life saver Marcus and his disgust over the Roman occupiers with a well-born legitimacy. When he and Marcus become Batman and Robin, he switches places quite effectively once they are past the wall.

The battles become tantamount to the action nature of the movie, and they’re not disappointing. The fort sequence when Marcus first takes the reins has a glorious tension, as the young upstart senses something that the tired veterans can’t detect. The British battlers are like punk rockers, practically spitting at their rivals and participating in kamikaze style attacks.

Where the film breaks down a bit is defined in it’s [Monty Python ‘Holy Grail’ Moments](#). [18] Besides the absurd muscular renderings on the armor, there is a supposedly serious moment when Marcus and Esca need some information. “See the man over the mountains,” the grizzled informant intones, and we expect to see “Tim the Scorcere” from the Python film in the very next scene.



Embattled: Channing Tatum in ‘The Eagle’
Photo credit: Matt Neitham for Focus Features

Also the journey beyond the wall takes too long and pays off in an expected way. It was like the anticipation of the infiltration was better than the action itself. But this is a small complaint in an absorbing sense of history in another time, with the scenery and process by director Kevin Macdonald coming to a satisfying “wink-wink” conclusion.

The roots of America, good and bad, are present in The Eagle, and it’s a good origin story to take up with your friends, Romans and countrymen, if they all have an inclination to lend their ears.

“The Eagle” opens everywhere on February 11th. Featuring Channing Tatum, Donald Sutherland, Tahar Rahim, Jamie Bell and Denis O’Hare. Screenplay by Jeremy Brock, directed by Kevin Macdonald. Rated “PG-13”

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