'300: Rise of an Empire' Gets Its 3D War On

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- 300: Rise of an Empire [2]
- David Wenhem [3]
- Eva Green [4]
- Greeks [5]
- Hans Matheson [6]
- HollywoodChicago.com Content [7]
- Lena Headey [8]
- Movie Review [9]
- Noam Murro [10]
- Patrick McDonald [11]
- Persians [12]
- Rodrigo Santoro [13]
- Sullivan Stapleton [14]
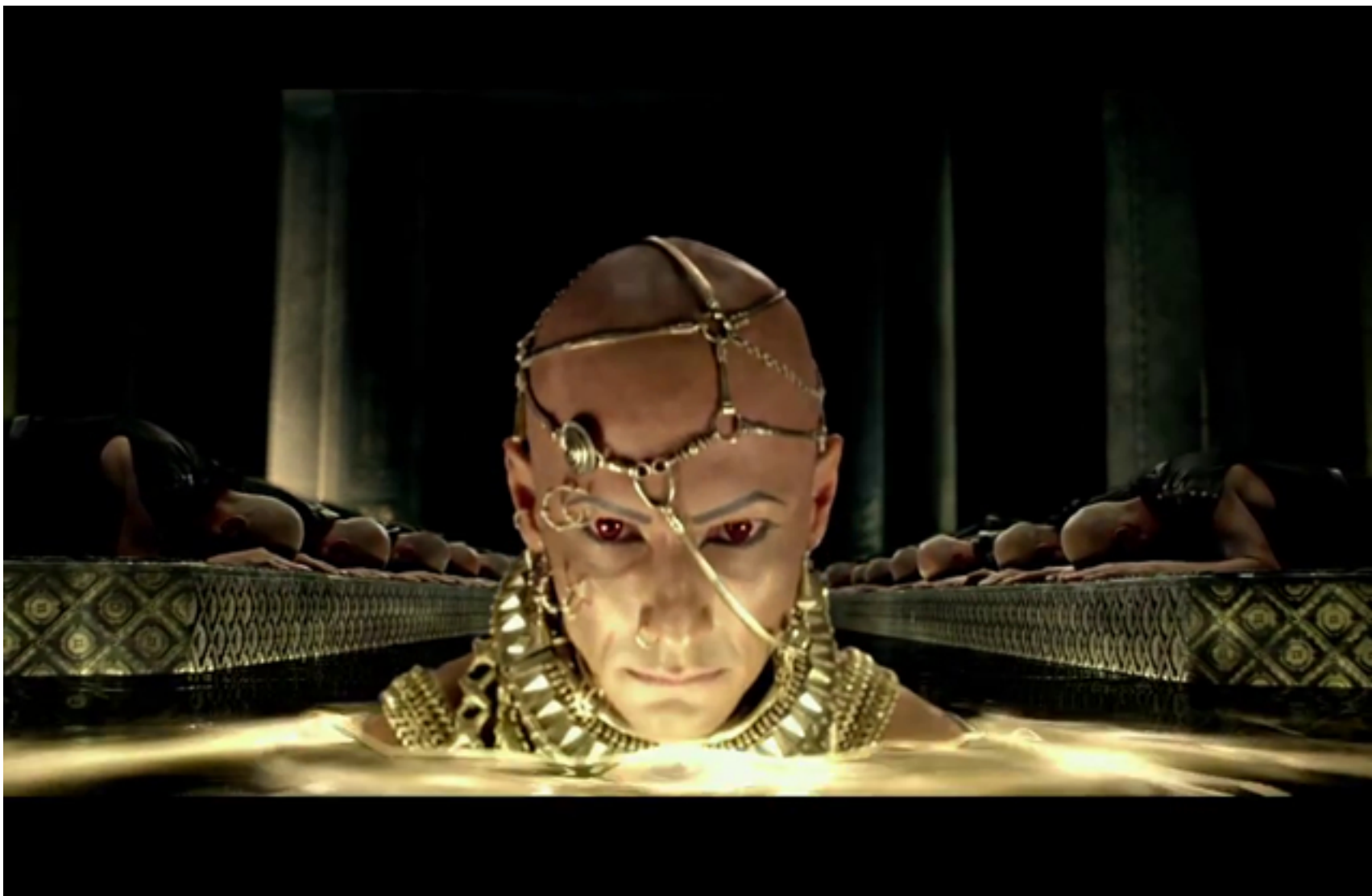- Warner Bros. Pictures [15]
- Zack Snyder [16]

Rating: **3.0**/5.0

CHICAGO – The rewriting of history in comic book movie form – not that's anything wrong with that – continues with "300: Rise of an Empire." Ancient wars are brought to life through a combination of mythology, six-pack abs, 3D blood spurts and comprehensive special effects, which can be better than history.

Nothing is unexpected in "300: Rise of an Empire" that wasn't expressed in the previous "300" film. The sequel is a series of war proclamations and battle, only to regroup for more speeches and then more conflict. Most of it happens on the sea, which allows for some exaggerated computer generated ships and their minions – at one point a horse rides among the rolling vessels. But all the blood, bodies and baring breasts are intact, richly presented in action packed 3D. For fans of the previous film, there is everything expected in the sequel, with no subtlety or explanations necessary.

Centered around the second Persian invasion of Greece, from about 480-479 BC. Xerxes of Persia (Rodrigo Santoro) wants revenge on Themistocles of Athens (Sullivan Stapleton) for the killing of his father. Xerxes becomes a demigod in this revenge transformation, egged on by Artemisia (Eva Green), a former Greek who has pledged allegiance to Persia and runs the naval operations.

The Emergence of Xerxes (Rodrigo Santoro) in '300: Rise of an Empire'

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Xerxes has initial success in the Battle of Marathon, and marches on to take Athens. In the calm before the next storm, Artemisia seeks negotiation in the form of lovemaking with Themistocles. When that fails to bring the peace, the stage is set for the climatic Battle of Salamis, an epic naval battle just south of the fallen Greek capital. Game on, or in this case, war on.

The design of the film is specific to the first one, and the same team – with Zack Snyder co-writing the script and producing, rather than directing – provides the atmosphere and the same battle electricity as "300." These type of action films are combinations of realistic computer renderings with live actors inserted into it – this reproduces Ancient Greece and its battles, but also makes it epic enough to invite comparisons from the comic book source.

The actors, although small entities among the enormity of the conflict, have to be as grand performance-wise as their surroundings. The lovely Eva Green spits nails as the revenge seeking Artemisia, and uses her strength equally in seduction. As a strong woman character pitted against the chiseled soldiers, she not only holds her own but steals the thunder. She gets, for example, to compare love making with battle in a classic line.

The rest of the cast follows her lead, and are able to deliver the various speeches of inspiration before battle, and then the subsequent battle cries. Australian actor Sullivan Stapleton takes on the Gerard Butler role as leader from the previous film, and is appropriately earnest. Rodrigo Santoro transforms to demigod early in the film as Xerxes, with a baptismal metamorphosis assisted by hermits, caves glowing pools, and unfortunately no payoff.

Artemisia (Eva Green) Wants a Piece of the Action in '300: Rise of an Empire'
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

There will be blood in such an epic, and there are gallons of it, albeit comic book style exaggeration. Human life is fairly cheap in this war, which is desensitizing in a way, and repetitive. There is one anonymous battler on one of the ships that is a fire bomb expert, until he is consumed by his backfiring flames. You'd hate to lose a man like that. The battles are the focus, and the structure of the story is secondary – it is actually up to the characters to hold on to the flimsy structure, and get us to why we experience the "300." It's the swords, sandals and shields, with a break for some topless nudity.

This is available in IMAX 3D for full effect, as better to get the blood in the eyes. "300: Rise of an Empire" is nothing more than the evolution of what movies have been practicing for years – a taste of war lust for entertainment's sake

"300: Rise of an Empire" opens everywhere on March 7th. See local listings for IMAX or 3D theaters and show times. Featuring Sullivan Stapleton, Eva Green, Lena Headey, Hans Matheson, David Wenhem and Rodrigo Santoro. Written by Zack Snyder and Kurt Johnstad. Directed by Noam Murro. Rated "R"

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