

'King Arthur: Legend of the Sword' update falls flat

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4

Running Time: 126 min.

The tale of King Arthur has certainly been around a while, igniting the imagination of children (and in some cases, adults) for centuries. The 12th century fable gets a new update from an unlikely source in the big budget, *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*. But does some additional snappy banter and shirtless, bare-knuckle boxing add to the experience or even justify its existence?

For this adaptation, the plot has been simplified from its source material. Born into nobility and raised by the dignified King Uther (Eric Bana), the titular character is ushered away after his nefarious uncle Vortigern (Jude Law) makes a deal with supernatural figures in order to kill the family and claim the throne. Spending his childhood in a bordello, the grown Arthur (Charlie Hunnam) doesn't remember his past, but knows his way around darker elements of the city. Vortigern continues to search for the hero, whose lineage will be revealed if he pulls the magical sword Excalibur from a stone. In the process, Arthur must come to terms with his destiny and seek revenge on his uncle.

On a positive note, there is a lot of spectacle on display from the opening scene onward. Director Guy Ritchie (*Snatch*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*) excels at shooting in inventive ways and constantly keeps the camera moving and placed in interesting positions. The camera is mounted on actor's shoulders as they run through alleys and the large-scale battles are remarkable to behold. This movie was previewed in 3D and while it is a

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post-conversion, it looks quite strong with depth constantly evident. Overall, it's a very good-looking movie.

Unfortunately, this is essentially an origin story about a young man's rise to power, so don't expect much in the way of well-known supporting characters like Merlin or any sightings of Lancelot and Guinevere. In fact, the plot has been turned into a simple revenge tale; there can be no doubt that the ultimate goal here is to spark a lengthy series of films detailing all the events rather than do it all in one sitting.

It's funny though... for a film with a much narrower focus, it still jumps around haphazardly. As mentioned, the battles are incredibly elaborate and impressive on the eyes, but are hurried. The fast-cutting, time-shifting edits offer some humorous moments when characters are talking about their ideas ahead of time cross-cut with the plans being carried out. Yet while zippy, the action featured is oddly truncated; there are too many montages (one is even backed to a song) and as a result the big set pieces don't feel fully formed.

Tonally, things don't really gel either. The movie makes an attempt at keeping the traditional melodrama and heavy themes of loss, greed and revenge (captured with plenty of slow-motion screams and wails). Law makes for a nasty villain and his interrogations are effectively tense. Yet it comes as something of a contrast with the snappy banter between Arthur and his outlaw cohorts. In fact, this street-wise Arthur is a wise-ass, trading barbs and insults with the bad guys in equal measure. There are even some modern-sounding turns of phrase that feel out of place. Sure, the lines do result in a laugh or two, but it's a jarring shift from the more serious material.

King Arthur: Legend of the Sword has some fun individual moments, but the story is purely escapist and is lacking in majesty or importance. The movie isn't as effective as previous Arthur adaptations like *Excalibur* (1981). It also isn't nearly as strong as director Ritchie's previous features. While watching, I couldn't help but wonder why they didn't just allow the filmmaker to tell a modern day story about a London thug discovering he's the descendant of King Arthur. That would have justified the banter, gags and presented the chance for a funky update on the fable. Oh well, given that the story has been around for 800 plus years, I'm sure there will be another opportunity in the future.

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