

Movie Review: 300™

by David_Elliott

Some movies of carnage open our minds to war, death and history in a valid way, like Clint Eastwood's Iwo Jima films. And then there are the bloody piles of raw meat for finger-lickin' oafs, like "Apocalypto" and "300."

"300" has even more death than Mel Gibson's Mayan epic, a gain that adds up to a minus. Zack Snyder of "Dawn of the Dead" (the 2004 version) filmed Frank Miller's graphic novel, about the brave 300 Spartans who blooded the huge Persian army at Thermopylae in 480 BC. It sure is graphic. And ugly.

'300' - Persian warriors fall as the Spartan phalanx advances on them in a scene from the action movie '300.' CNS Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures. Shot as a vision of digital mud smeared with frosty whites and spraying spots of computerized blood, "300" is not for fans of Richard Egan in "The 300 Spartans" (1962). Egan was a firm block of wood, but recognizably human - the new King Leonidas is Gerard Butler, the "Phantom of the Opera" stiff, still bellowing close to opera level and sporting a mighty buff physique.

The Spartans mostly look recruited from an elite gym on Mount Olympus, and yet the movie puts down Athenians as nancies. The Spartans face the vast Persian hordes of Xerxes, who is very tall and sounds amplified, as if in Vegas. Rodrigo Santoro's Xerxes preens like a man for whom the sky is a mirror.

The Persians include weird creeps in shining monkey masks, war elephants and a giant with horrid skin and a tiny brain. Spartan priests appear to be lunar lepers, and a grotesque hunchback's hump could have made Quasimodo moan in envy. All feminists must now ponder Lena Headey as Sparta's queen, Gorgo, who gets naked but also pontificates about Spartan pride in a very macho-fox way.

The Spartans are so suicidally drunk with desire for death, matched by Persian mobs that seem barely able to imagine it, that the script's crude, a-b-c exhortations seem pointless. The most shining relics of the ancient Greek world are its words, but the words of "300" have the eloquence of Hollywood writers devouring comic books.

There are endless spearings and beheadings, plus dying horses and a whole wall made of corpses. You wouldn't wish to smell this movie, but we nearly can. It is too dumb as drama, even as war spectacle, to be transporting, frightening or sickening. Just numbing.

A Warner Bros. release. Director: Zack Snyder. Cast: Gerard Butler, Lena Headey, Dominic West, Rodrigo Santoro. Running time: 1 hour, 57 minutes; Rated R; 1 star.

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