

MOVIES

Review: ‘Immortals’—Tarsem Singh’s Modern Day Take on Renaissance Artwork

Immortals | Directed by Tarsem Singh | Drama, Action, Fantasy | R | 1h 50m

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An action-packed, visually stunning, and highly dramatized story of Theseus resistance against the ruthless King Hyperion and the Titans. Being another typical gladiator movie produced out of Hollywood, director Tarsem Singh introduces a new take on viewing the retelling of these ancient heroes. While the storyline of the movie isn’t lined up for an Oscar—the graphics and overall artistic take on illustrating the scenes definitely could.

Cinematography is often defended by its filmophiles as an art that is brought to life by directors, and in Tarsem’s case—this claim is very true. Every scene in “Immortals”—and I mean EVERY scene—could’ve been a painting fresh out of the Renaissance period. And now while the Renaissance isn’t known for its landscapes, the opening scenes of the film are a key representative of beautiful Renaissance imagery painted by the side of the cliff on the water and colored with high contrasted lighting tones and pops of colors in the sunset. This typical opening scene is seen in all movies to give the viewer a sense of the film’s setting, however the artistic choices Tarsem made in its depiction using deep-focused shots and almost “melted” transition into the next scene informs the viewer from the beginning that they are not in for the typical dramatic gladiator film, but rather another typical gladiator film—with spectacular visuals.

For a poorly written movie, the acting was pretty convincing. Fitting for the role of Theseus who fights for the undesirables, superman Henry Cavill plays his role—who not by

Tarsem's influence is also visually stunning. Cavill does an excellent job capturing the role of an *angsty* peasant who strongly opposes the tyrannical rulers that slaughtered his family and fellow villagers. His facial expressions and tone throughout the movie are believable, he overall just does an excellent job of becoming your new favorite attractive underdog.

Supported by the gods, Theseus has been chosen as the mortal man to save his countryside from Hyperion's reign and the potential release of the Titans from Mount Tartarus. The gods are all



depicted in the heavens watching Theseus' journey from birth to where he is now—relying on him being the mortal to fight the injustice occurring in the mortal world. And of course it would be easy for the gods to interfere and fix all mortal problems, however Zeus is adamant about the god's interference in mortal affairs unless the Titans are released because there is no point in the mortal world if that's the case. Zeus has strong faith in Theseus and his ability to lead his people—his ability to be a hero to unite them.

Throughout Theseus' journey he is accompanied by the striking virgin oracle Phaedra, played by Frieda Pinto, and a thief named Stavros. Enslaved in a salt mine, Theseus and Stavros receive word from Phaedra that they are to escape and states that if they leave, their journey will be the one to possibly overthrow Hyperion. After escaping, they encounter many trials and misfortunes that seamlessly always ended with Theseus managing to survive by the interference of the gods coming to save him last minute. This choice by the writers definitely takes away from Theseus' own ability as a hero, like he always needs the support of the gods or divine interference to save his people. It didn't provide the audience with the idea of Theseus being a reliable hero. Now there were plenty of skilled fights that he partook in where he very stylishly fought his way through men, however when it came down to life or death—it was always either Poseidon, Ares, or Athena saving him...and this is BEFORE the Titans are released. Despite the heroic ancient account of Theseus, maybe the writers didn't want him to appear to be dependable? But, what's the point in doing that if they never save his character's ability to fight things on his own at any point during rest of their journey?

In the film Theseus is supported by the oracle of Phaedra, who assists him in his acquirement the Epirus Bow. Of divine nature, the bow can spawn an infinite amount of arrows if you pull at the bowstring and seemingly defies the laws of physics when he fires four bows to cross long-distance and does not angle the bow whatsoever. Maybe the bow has an autocorrect feature? However, it's not long after Theseus acquires the bow that Hyperion manages to steal it from him...and then the bow isn't even physically used at all during the rest of the film—though the whole journey they embarked on was for this heavenly bow. Near the end the bow is shown for a few seconds, but isn't even in the hand of Theseus at the end. On one note, it saves the idea of Theseus being able to conquer Hyperion in a one-on-one fight by himself—no divine influence. However, it makes than half of the movie meaningless. If he's meant to save his homeland from falling into ruin by himself—by mortal means—then why have Zeus provide him with a divine bow in the first place?

Not unlike any other ancient gladiator film, “Immortals” strays from its historical account. Theseus is known as the slayer of the minotaur and the mythological founder of Athens, but seemingly neither of these elements are suggested in the film. In the film, he does fight the minotaur—however it's a man in a beast costume...not an actual minotaur. So the whole excitement of waiting for Theseus to slay a real minotaur, and ending up seeing a soldier come out in a fetishized costume of the minotaur definitely was a letdown. With all the fantastic CGI in the film, they couldn't splurge on a better minotaur? Additionally, in the end, Theseus doesn't actually find Athens or anything similar to that. The writers really did not try to stick to close to the storyline or overall ability of Theseus as a mortal. However, they do try to salvage some of the typical ancient hero themes by mentioning the idea of leaving behind a glorious story to be passed down for others to hear about. In the final fight between Hyperion and Theseus, Hyperion questions “[Theseus] what does it feel like knowing there will be no memory of you, that I will be the hero”. This idea was essential to the understanding of the ancient hero and motivated them throughout their constant obstacles to leave behind a fame that is essentially immortal in its passage from generation to generation. The writers of the film do pay homage to this in the scene where they depict a massive stone with the story of Theseus pictured and engraved all around it as Theseus' son is gazing at it. Meanwhile, Theseus is above in the heavens fighting alongside the gods in their war—now as an immortal.

Now while the writers of the film may have failed in convincing the audience of Theseus as a magnificent hero, Tarsem strongly distracts the audience from that letdown and never fails to catch their attention with his extravagant imagery and art style. Every scene seemed to melt into the other in its transitions, with the effects of the recent scene growing into the next. Everything felt connected as if it was one incredibly long filmed shot—probably why I had to take a breath after watching the entirety of the film. Or it could've been from keeping up with the highly dramatized action scenes—though they were the highlight of the film. I can say without a doubt that I could not peel my eyes away from ANY of the combat scenes. If there was a way to properly overdo the fighting action in a film—this was it. Every scene had at least one, but typically many slow motion shots to demonstrate either the prowess of Theseus or the gods. However, Tarsem has an interesting take on the slow motion scenes where Theseus or the gods are in full speed as they fight, but their enemies are all in slow motion as they are overtaken by them. It especially draws in the audience's eye on their overall skill and magnificence in battle. In addition, to highlight these dramatic scenes Tarsem cuts out almost all sound. The most climatic fighting scenes—minus the final fight between Theseus and Hyperion (which overall really was not very impressive)—are absolutely silent. These moments trapped the audience and forced them to feel as though they are there watching the battle unfold right before their eyes.



Another eye-catching element of the film was the costumes. Everything about them screamed money. Like honestly, Athena in her completely gold outfit looked like she just walked off of Zuhair Murad's Fall 2011 runway. Everything about the gods was simply picturesque. From their garments to their physical beauty to their fluid fighting style—everything! Though some of the choices in headgear for the gods were a little odd—most notably Poseidon's—they just added to the excess of radiance that just overflowed from the atmosphere of the gods.



Unlike most action heavy gladiator films, like “300” and “Clash of the Titans”, “Immortals” effectively captures the label as an artwork. The characters are beautiful in their physical appearance and mannerisms. The landscape of the mortal world is breathtaking as well. Though some could argue that the dark coloring of shots for the film are sometimes hard to see, they add to the the drama and quality of the film. It provided the viewer with a serious tone when approaching the film, despite its lackluster plot. Additionally, the view of the heavens is stunning. His Renaissance inspired take on the shots for the film are magnificent. The final scene of the movie where the audience is at a worm’s-eye view staring at Theseus fighting a war with the gods in the heavens is stunning. It feels like the viewer was taken into the Sistine chapel and is gazing at the glorious works of Michelangelo. On top of the aesthetics for these shots, Tarsem’s choice in heavily contrasted scenes for the mortal world and bright colors for the heavens supported the films theme of good vs. evil or in a literal sense—light vanquishing the dark.



Immortals (2011)

Director Tarsem Singh

Writers Charley Parlapanides and Vlas Parlapanides

Stars Henry Cavill, Mickey Rourke, John Hurt

Rating R

Running Time 1h 50m

Genre Drama, Action, Fantasy