

## “CLASH OF THE TITANS” (Film Review)

Written by Allan Dart

Thursday, 01 April 2010 15:01

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You won't remember the TITANS. At least, I won't. THE INCREDIBLE HULK director Louis Leterrier's middling remake has plenty of action, but it pales in comparison to the 1981 original. I'm sorry, but when it comes to CLASH OF THE TITANS, I want Burgess Meredith and Bubo!

As a child of the '80s, the original CLASH OF THE TITANS was my introduction to the wonderful stop-motion world of Ray Harryhausen, Greek mythology and Harry Hamlin. Is the film perfect? No. Do I love it to this day? A resounding yes! I pretty much abhor the remake and 3-D craze that's clogging up multiplexes today, but I'm an open-minded person and was willing to judge this new CLASH on its own merits. Now that I've seen it, though, I can say two things with conviction: It's an inferior redux, and the 3-D (which was added in postproduction) is a complete failure.

The screenplay by Travis Beacham and Phil Hay & Matt Manfredi has a lot in common with Beverley Cross' script for the '81 CLASH, but drops certain characters, adds new ones and goes in a few different directions. In this story, the gods created man, whose prayers and adoration provide them with their immortality and strength (and also inflate their astronomical egos). The gods expect and demand humanity's worship, but the ungrateful mortals are starting to rebel and think for themselves.



Zeus (a shimmering Liam Neeson) is upset by the mortals' defiance, and permits his resentful and hateful brother Hades (a hirsute Ralph Fiennes), god of the underworld, to put fear into the hearts of men by threatening to release the monstrous sea creature known as the Kraken on the city of Argos. Hades convinces his brother that this will make the mortals pray for Zeus'

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intervention, which in turn would reestablish Zeus' power over them.

Mankind's only hope is Perseus, played by Sam “I'm in every tentpole action film” Worthington. He is Zeus' son, half god/half man, but he has loathed the gods even since Hades killed his adoptive family. This leads to Perseus agreeing to go with Argos' soldiers on a dangerous mission to speak with the Stygian witches, who will know how to defeat the Kraken. One of those soldiers is Draco (CASINO ROYALE's Mads Mikkelsen), who doesn't much care for the demigod Perseus. Also along for the ride is the guardian angel-like Io (Gemma Arterton, another Bond alumna from QUANTUM OF SOLACE) and several Djinn that they meet on their quest.

Like its inspiration, this CLASH contains lots of creatures with which Perseus and his cohorts must contend. The mythological monstrosities include harpies, giant “scorpiochs,” Medusa, the unsightly Calibos and, of course, the Kraken. And after about 30 or so minutes of establishing the slight story and thin characters, CLASH delivers about 60 to 70 minutes of almost nonstop CGI action. But the mayhem, like the monsters, people and plot, never engaged me. Sure, lots of things are going on and humans and nonhumans are racing across the screen, but Leterrier's direction is often hectic and hard to follow. And as far as the creatures go, except for the scorpiochs (huge scorpions that start off terrorizing our heroes, but then for some reason have a change of heart and become domesticated animals), none of the CG creations stand out. Remember how cool and creepy Harryhausen's Medusa was? And this Calibos doesn't hold a candle to Neil McCarthy's original vindictive, brutish beast. The new Kraken isn't half-bad, but it too closely echoes the CLOVERFIELD creature, and Leterrier makes the unfortunate decision to build it up for most of the picture, only to give the colossal sea beast scant screen time in the picture's anticlimactic finale.

As noted above, the characters are weak, and the story lacks both emotion and heart. Worthington's Perseus is bland and one-note. He wants vengeance, but that underdeveloped motivation is just an excuse to have Perseus battle a bevy of foes. And except for Draco, Argos' soldiers are entirely forgettable and interchangeable. Neeson plays Zeus as a stately, egocentric deity with a weakness for humans, while Fiennes uses a raspy voice to express Hades' hateful nature. Frankly, I didn't much care for either of them. Zeus' motivations and feelings about the mortals whimsically change whenever it suits the story, and I still don't understand the parameters of Hades' powers—he has the upper hand on Zeus only when required, and passes on killing Perseus on a number of occasions. The script doesn't establish the necessary set of rules for the gods and their powers.

Speaking of the gods, it also feels like CLASH was trimmed down a bit. Just like the original,

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this film has familiar faces cast as various deities—but you never get to meet them! While checking the press notes after seeing the movie, I said to myself, “Wait one second! Danny Huston, Jane March and Izabella Miko were gods in this?” Blink and you’ll miss them. The same goes for Elizabeth McGovern (remember her?) as Perseus’ mother Marmara. Maybe if the filmmakers had focused as much on the protagonists and their relationships as they did on the swordfights against digital creatures, this would’ve been a better redux. I’m not saying Harry Hamlin is Sean Penn, but the characters and critters in the original are by far more memorable than this CLASH’s uninspired assembly. Additionally, despite having a much bigger budget and more resources (technological and otherwise) than the ’81 film, this CLASH doesn’t feel epic at all.

There will be some who say it’s unfair to compare the two films. I say, “That’s nonsense.” If you remake a movie, you have to expect comparisons. In that regard, I have no inclination to see this CLASH again, but I am looking forward to putting the original in my Netflix queue. As a stand-alone movie, forgetting the fact that it’s a redux, this CLASH isn’t a terrible film, just a mediocre one. Some things are ineffable, but I guess the best way I can put it is that this CLASH lacks the magic and joy of the first adventure. Sure, Harryhausen’s Kraken was a stop-motion miniature, but in my book, he will always tower over the titanic CG leviathan on display here.

One final note: Avoid the 3-D version at all costs! It is a complete ripoff. The extra dimension was added in postproduction, and it shows. The image is way too dark, and the 3-D doesn’t work; in many scenes, it isn’t even apparent at all, while in others, the foreground image or actor stands out like a cardboard cutout. If you must see CLASH OF THE TITANS, save some money and watch it in 2-D.

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