

'The Legend of Tarzan' has its flaws, but adds some interesting elements

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

Running Time: 110 min.

It seems like Warner Brothers' expensive attempt to reboot the Edgar Rice Burroughs character of Tarzan hasn't been getting a whole lot of publicity over the past couple of weeks. Perhaps this is because it's an aged property that appears old-fashioned to many. And a truly horrific real-life incident involving a gorilla earlier in the month may have caused some discomfort for viewers and marketing departments. Whatever the reason, *The Legend of Tarzan* appears likely to take a beating with critics and at the box office.

I feel a little badly for the film. Yes, it is clunky in spots and certainly has its fair share of issues, but in actuality this movie is a perfectly competent endeavor. Faint praise to be sure, but it's noticeably better than the latest *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* or *Independence Day* sequels, and it's a considerable improvement on previous live-action adaptations like *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan* (1984) or the abominable *Tarzan and the Lost City* (1998).

The reboot begins with Tarzan (Alexander Skarsgård) having returned to England from Africa with wife Jane (Margot Robbie), taking up an aristocratic position as Viscount John Clayton. When he's asked to return to the Congo Free State as an ambassador to see the humanitarian efforts of Belgian King Leopold II, the protagonist initially refuses. However, concerns raised by George Washington Williams (Samuel L. Jackson) about abuses in the territory convince the hero and wife to return. Once there, a nefarious plot by King Leopold II's envoy, Captain Leon

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Rom (Christoph Waltz) is revealed.

No doubt the filmmakers have had a difficult job in re-imagining this character for the modern age. In between the traditional action, our story must deal with the very serious, disturbing, and real violence brought about by colonialism. Tarzan is inherently a bit goofy when embracing his feral instincts, as well as swinging around from vine to vine. In certain instances, elements of corniness (slow-motion heroic poses and lengthy embraces with Jane) come across as an odd contrast to the darker, heavier themes.

Still, despite the occasional slice of cheese, the cast is capable. Skarsgård makes for a fine Tarzan and Jackson stands out once again as Williams. He serves as an enjoyable entry point for viewers, staring in bafflement at his cohort's animalistic turns, and often sharply commenting on the strange actions being asked of him. The two characters share an enjoyable camaraderie. The villain is also an appropriately officious and stuffy character, nonplussed by the brutality and carnage he causes. And Jane is given more strength and pro-activeness than she has possessed in previous adaptations.

The sets are truly impressive as well, from a waterfall locale to various environments on the plains, in the jungle, and on the river. In fact, it's surprising to learn that the entirety of the feature was shot in England and Wales. Viewing the film in IMAX 3D was also a pleasant surprise. Despite the 3D being a post-conversion job, there's a lot of depth on display and elements often pop out of frame. Director David Yates has had plenty of experience using this technique in the final four *Harry Potter* films. And so the shot setups work in either dimension. Overall, it's a good-looking movie.

And the story itself is fast-paced. The fights, including showdowns with wild animals as well as gun-toting soldiers are all effectively put together ... even if some of the confrontations play out too quickly. Of course, in today's day and age, all gorillas, leopards, ostriches, and otherwise are computer generated. They look it, but aren't so phony that they stick out as too much of a distraction.

It's no classic and will come across to many as out of fashion, but *The Legend of Tarzan* is an efficiently produced effort that also attempts to add a deeper context to an otherwise well-worn tale. While the tone isn't always on the mark, at least somber issues like imperialism *are* being addressed. Although it doesn't all work, overall it's interesting enough to engage fans of

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the character, as well as general audiences looking for an adventure.

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