

Limitations leave gaping holes in a 'Legend'



Putting myth onto film is a difficult task at best, and when this myth pits natural good vs. evil incarnate, the film's job becomes infinitely tougher. After all, when the stakes are that high we expect nothing short of an epic.

Ridley Scott's "Legend" misses the epic sweep needed to give the battle between light and darkness the cosmic proportions Scott insists exist. All of the action is tied into a beautiful Netherworld forest, a wonderfully-realized location constructed entirely by Scott and company to create a magic fairytale land. Its location is obscure and any sense of direction within the forest is unimportant. The mystical characters know their way around and that's enough.

Yet this setting is too confined because, for all of Scott's efforts to keep the action moving around this undefined space, it simply feels too small. No vistas, no master shots give us any sense

of magnitude and the scope of the story is too limited to allow the time factor to help open up the sweep.

Simply put, there isn't enough there to convince us that the fate of the world hangs in the balance.

The cast, too, seems limiting. Jack (Tom Cruise), a medieval version of Mother Nature's son, is in love with the Princess Lili (Mia Sara), who comes to visit Jack in his forest home. In a special gesture, Jack allows Lili to glimpse the power of light and good in this world — a pair of unicorns.

However, the Lord of Darkness (Tim Curry at his theatrical best) has plans to destroy the beasts and enshroud the world in darkness and cold. Lili's presence allows the minions of Darkness to injure one of the beasts and throw the delicately-balanced world into a raging storm.

Jack and Lili are separated and both dedicate themselves to righting the world. Lili overhears Darkness' plan to capture and kill the surviving unicorn

and runs to save the animal. Meanwhile, Jack teams up with the elf Gump, dwarves Screwball and Brown Tom and fairy Oona to fight Darkness on his own turf — his dreaded underground kingdom of death.

Every frame of the film is stacked in detail. The opening scenes are suffused with a golden-white light that plays on the rose petals that fill the air. Later, the wind-swept petals are replaced by bubbles and, even later, drifting snowflakes. The middle and background are minutely-realized settings — a lush forest, a mist-enshrouded bog, dark and dangerous caverns with death waiting around every corner. All of these sets are artificial creations that rival the detail Scott put into his previous "Blade Runner" sets. Scott doesn't merely make movies; he creates worlds.

Yet something is missing from this carefully-crafted land of magic and myth. The quest seems too short, the cast too limited, the answer too simple and easily won for a battle of this magnitude.

And, finally, the opening prologue about the need for co-existence between light and dark for balance is never actually proven or even necessary for the conclusion of the tale.

For Ridley Scott the image is the film, style is meaning and detail is explanation. As this is the case it would be nice to see his original creation, his cut which is being seen in Europe. Unfortunately, Universal decided that the film had to be recut to make sense to American audiences (the same reasoning that allowed "Once Upon A Time In America" to be hacked and sliced out of shape). For some reason, Universal seems to believe that we aren't as "sophisticated" as the European audiences.

Perhaps the original cut does allow for a sense of quest and a feeling of magnitude, perhaps not. However, I do know that in this incarnation, "Legend" is somewhat less than legendary.

By Sean Axmaker

Polish postwar love story cunning, insightful



In "A Year Of The Quiet Sun," Polish director Krzysztof Zanussi has fashioned a subtle film about war-ravaged Poland, circa 1946, where an American soldier attempts to romance a Polish civilian. Norman is part of an Allied commission investigating war crimes. Emilia is a widow who lives with her ailing mother and paints. Both are fortyish, age-wise.

The storyline is simple: Norman tries to convince Emilia to move to America with him. She reciprocates his love, but eventually refuses to leave Poland.

Now, in love stories involving people from different backgrounds, there are two cliché-ridden possibilities: "They lived happily ever after" and "Two ships passing in the night, destined never to meet." "A Year Of The Film" manages to avoid both dangers. Indeed, Zanussi is not so much concerned with love as with the possibility of happiness.

His other films treat themes such as the difficulty of moral action in a modern

world. Thus, the flashing lights we see continually in "A Year" refer not to the stars crossing the lovers' eyes, but to beams that shine into the eyes making action difficult.

At first Emilia resists Norman's stammering attempts at contact but finally relents, thanks to his doggedness. Neither speaks the other's language and much time is spent with translators, but it is by intuition and gesture that the Polish woman and American man understand each other. The language difference is more a source of shared humor than a handicap: Emilia has great fun with the Polish-English dictionary and later, both Emilia and Norman laugh uproariously at the bumbling efforts of their young Polish interpreter.

Next door to Emilia lives Stella, a woman who worked in a brothel for German SS officers during the war, and who continues to turn an occasional trick. Emilia's mother and the Polish authorities shun her, but Emilia is adamant about refusing to judge her. Emilia is equally serious about keeping her suf-

fering to herself, and lives this rule to the extreme. When hoodlums invade her apartment, rob her and her mother, beat up her mother and nearly rape Emilia, she says nothing about this to anyone — including Norman.

Norman is both tortured by and drawn to his own memories of humiliation in a Nazi concentration camp. When he discovers that Stella's boyfriend is German, Norman encourages the man to order him to raise his hands and turn around, in German. When Stella's beau complies with this seeming jest, Norman almost strangles him. Nevertheless, Norman makes it clear to Emilia that he intends to pursue a happy future with her back in the States.

Emilia understands him perfectly, but disagrees. Her wish to remain in Poland, and find happiness in suffering in the same land where her dead husband lies, is morbid and downright incomprehensible to her fellow Poles. A priest who hears her confession urges Emilia to depart with Norman, rather than encourage her to remain true to her dead

husband.

Observations about the Polish historical experience are tightly woven into the narrative. Zanussi doesn't caricature Americans in his film; instead, he encourages comparisons between Poland and the United States. For example, in one of their rare moments of joy, Norman and Emilia drive through a meadow and sing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." The cow they see walking through the grass sets off a land mine. American nursery rhymes would become very macabre if rewritten in the light of Polish history.

All in all, "A Year Of The Quiet Sun" offers an insightful view of a romance tainted by the very memories of tragedy on one country's soil. The understated performances provide a welcome relief from Redford and Streep. Don't miss it!

"A Year Of The Quiet Sun" is playing at Cinema 7, in the Atrium Building at West 10th Avenue and Olive Street.

By Michael James

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