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Mongol - The Rise to Power of Genghis Khan - DVD

Gore fest or bore fest?

by Neil Queen published on 26 September 2008

There are some actors and directors whose name on a film poster or DVD cover will move you to check out something you may have overlooked. Guy Ritchie isn't one of them, but for me Tadanobu Asano is. Having slinked his way into pop culture through well-chosen roles in Asian gems like Ichi The Killer and Last Life In The Universe, he rarely seems to reprise the same part, yet brings a suave tranquillity every time. Like Ichi, here he again plays a man who has no beef with shedding blood, only this time he's just a tad less deranged.

Mongol, nominated for the Best Foreign Language Oscar, finds Asano playing Temudjin, the man later known as Genghis Khan. Even as a nipper has a flair for kicking off tribal warfare, as it's his refusal to go along with an arranged marriage that's planned by his warlordly ruler father to appease an enemy that causes a bit of an off. Doing this ultimately costs his dear old dad his life and his empire, which in terms of negligence isn't too far off getting your old man a James Blunt album for Father's Day.

As the son of a dethroned khan, Temudjin has a price on his own head, and as Mongol concerns itself with the events that led to the creation of the legend, we get front row seat as the new and a-bit-less-honourable khan tries to subjugate him until he reaches an age when he can be killed without it being seen as an act of cowardice. Along the way he becomes blood brothers with Jamukah, a boy who also becomes a mighty warrior, but events turn him against Temudjin and into partnership with the khan. This brings us to one almighty bundle of major geographical and historical significance, one that offers the future Genghis the chance to finally avenge his father and unite Mongolia, ridding the land of the arseholism that has taken root after his father's



...cont.

death.

Kind of like Braveheart with equally funny accents, Mongol is stunning to watch, both for its astounding scenery and the set-piece battles. Curiously, there's also a tender love story at its heart, one which reveals the film's aim. A blood-letter par excellence he may have been, but this supposedly historically sound account focuses on his morality and strength of character, as he becomes a leader of men due to his nobility and respect for others.

The National Geographic visuals are complemented by the way that Mongol seeks to capture the culture of the Mongolians - as when Temudjin's wife allows herself to become another man's plaything to save him, her portrayal as a possession is never coloured by comment, it is simply shown as the way they lived then. This gives the film a dislocation from Western and Hollywood values that so seduced the Oscar gang.

VERDICT

Asano brings a placid depth to the Genghis Khan legend, lending resonance to his stoic nature, while Honglei Sun adds some much-needed colour as the more charismatic Jamukah.

Striking in scope and visceral in its violence, this is one of those films that will remind you why you wanted to buy that massive plasma TV in the first place. It is a widescreen spectacle that blends the majesty of the Eastern and the expanse of the Western - a tale of honour, betrayal, mysticism and of dirty great swords getting stuck into people's bodies.

Rating: 15

Starring: Tadanobu Asano, Odnyam Odsuren, Sun Honglei, Khulan Chuluun

Directed by: Sergei Bodrov

Extras: Trailers, making of

At a glance

What is it?

Military history claret-fest

Good

Most of it - some satisfying action scenes, some strong performances and some remarkable locations

Bad

Some of you may wish for less loving, more slicing

Verdict

Striking in scope and visceral in its violence, this film reminds you why you wanted to buy that massive plasma TV in the first place

Price 19.99/Blu-ray & £24.99

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10