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Legend of the Guardians: The Owls Of Ga'Hoole

Reviewed by **Bill Gibron** on Sep 23 2010



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Zack Snyder is a tough filmmaker to figure out. After getting his start in commercials, he scored a hit with his imaginative remake of George A. Romero's zombie classic *Dawn of the Dead*. He then went on to rewrite the graphic novel adaptation rulebook with such striking efforts as *300* and *Watchmen*. Now comes *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole*, his entry into the already overdone 3D CGI family film. Based on the book series by Kathryn Lasky, Snyder is not out to deconstruct the genre. Instead, he hopes that optical wonders and stunning cinematography will win the day. He's almost right.



Bill Gibron

Bill Gibron is a veteran film critic from Tampa, Florida.

[full bio of Bill Gibron](#)

Soren (voiced by Jim Sturgess) and his owl brother Kludd (Ryan Kwanten) live relatively peaceful lives in their wooded glen. Raised on their father's (Hugo Weaving) stories of the legendary warriors of Ga'Hoole, the former fancies himself destined for greatness. His sibling, however, is sick of Soren's dawdling and daydreaming. One night, they are kidnapped by the minions of Metalbeak (Joel Edgerton), a disfigured, power mad bird who, along with his right hand confidant Nyra (Helen Mirren) hopes to use the young ones as slaves. They plan on harvesting a rare metal and using it to destroy all in their path. With the help of a double crossing librarian (Weaving again), an elf owl named Gylfie (Emily Barclay) and a ragtag band of helpers, Soren determines to find the Great Ga'Hoole Tree and get the occupants who live there to help him fight the growing threat.

Legends of the Guardians is a technical masterpiece. This movie looks amazing, boasts a

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Film:	Legend of the Guardians: The Owls Of Ga'Hoole
Starring:	Sam Neill , Geoffrey Rush , Hugo Weaving , David Wenham , Emily Barclay , Abbie Cornish , Emilie de Ravin , Ryan Kwanten , Jay Laga'aia , Miriam Margolyes , Helen Mirren , Jim Sturgess
Director:	Zack Snyder
Screenwriter:	John Orloff , John Collee
Producer:	Zareh Nalbandian
Genre:	Fantasy
MPAA Rating:	PG
Year:	2010

naturalistic and organic production design that would put other computer generated titles to shame, and offers an imaginative (and sometimes thrilling) use of technology in both detail and determined action. The visual element is repeatedly awe-inspiring, and Snyder's eye for composition and scope is striking. If movies were judged on style over substance alone, *Legend of the Guardians* would be a game changer, a work that all other like minded efforts strive to imitate.

Too bad then that the center is so emotionally hollow. Because of the epic hero formulas at play, because of the storytelling stereotypes employed in order to keep the wee ones attentive and checked-in, *Legend of the Guardians* fails to engage. It may startle the eyes, but it does very little for the heart. We don't really worry for Soren. We know that his bad brother Kludd is headed for some manner of Darth-destiny. And we recognize the various ancillary characters as comic/cruel cogs in a well-worn good vs. evil narrative mechanism. Together, they get us from plot point A to B, but do so in a vague, uninspired manner.

The voice work could be part of the problem. Instead of employing recognizable names to bring these characters to life, Snyder relies on several accomplished British/Australian actors to realize his aims. While the performances can be strong, the accents are often indecipherable. Even worse, we are so used to villains speaking the clipped Queen's English that several scenes become cliches all their own. Besides, anyone who has seen a big budget Hollywood boys' adventure tale will recognize the nods to known mythical elements -- sibling rivalry, innocence threatened, master/mentors on either side, an evil talisman -- clashing with odd avian eccentricities (owls feel things via their gizzard, we are told). We even get a noxious training montage set to some syrupy tween pop song.

Legend of the Guardians is clearly a movie at odds with itself. On the one hand, it inspires awe with its visionary aesthetic achievements. On the other, it's the same old hero hokum. While the former finally wins out, the latter makes the victory bittersweet indeed.

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