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New U.S. Release

One Night With the King

By JOE LEYDON

A Gener8Xion Entertainment release of a Gener8Xion Entertainment production. Produced by Richard J. Cook, Stephan Blinn, Matthew Crouch, Laurie Crouch. Directed by Michael O. Sajbel. Screenplay, Stephan Blinn, based on the novel "Hadassah" by Tommy Tenney, Mark Andrew Olsen.

Esther/Hadassah - Tiffany Dupont
 King Xerxes - Luke Goss
 Mordecai - John Rhys-Davis
 Prince Admantha - John Noble
 Hagai - Tommy "Tiny" Lister
 Hamen - James Callis
 Jesse - Jonah Lotan
 Samuel - Peter O'Toole
 Prince Memucan - Omar Sharif

Blessed with abundant production values and a minimum of campy excess, "One Night With the King" is a surprisingly satisfying attempt to revive the Old Hollywood tradition of lavishly appointed Biblical epics aimed at mainstream auds. Pic has a much broader appeal than earlier product produced by Gener8Xion Entertainment ("The Omega Code," "Carman: The Champion"), and conceivably could attract ticketbuyers who have ignored other recent pics aimed primarily at devout churchgoers. Indeed, even a few diehard non-believers may be won over by the considerable charisma of top-billed newcomer Tiffany Dupont.

Strictly speaking, pic's source material isn't Holy Scripture, but rather a historical novel -- "Hadassah" by Tommy Tenney and Mark Andrew Olsen -- based on the Book of Esther. Even so, scripter Stephan Blinn sticks fairly close to the original, divinely inspired scenario while tracing the rise of an orphaned Jewish peasant girl who becomes the wife of King Xerxes of Persia.

Hadassah (Dupont), an appealingly spirited gamine, was adopted by her uncle, Mordecai (John Rhys-Davies), a dutiful scribe to King Xerxes (Luke Goss) in the capital city of Susa. Fortuitously -- or, perhaps more accurately, miraculously -- Hadassah is in the right place at the right time when an angry Xerxes banishes his prideful wife, and sends his minions throughout the land to abduct worthy candidates to be the new queen.

Mordecai suggests his niece keep her Jewish heritage a secret if she is seized -- which, of course, she is -- and enhances the imposture by re-naming her Esther. All in all, a good career move.

Esther immediately stands out in the eyes Hagai (Tommy "Tiny" Lister), the king's chief eunuch. Hagai befriends the young woman and takes steps to ensure Xerxes will be equally impressed. He is.

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Luke Goss as the king crowns Tiffany Dupont the new Queen Esther in 'One Night With the King,' a Gener8Xion Entertainment release.



Esther becomes queen just in time to impede the progress of two conspirators -- Prince Admantha (John Noble), a sly fox with designs on the throne, and Hamen (James Callis), a dark schemer with a long-standing grievance against Jews.

Prince Memucan (Omar Sharif), a loyal member of the court, plays a major role in undermining Admantha. But Hamen very nearly launches a program to exterminate all Jews in the kingdom before Esther is able to open Xerxes' eyes to his treachery.

Helmer Michael O. Sajbel occasionally pushes too hard, especially when he bedecks Hamen with a swastika-like herald to underscore the plotter's anti-Semitism. (Fortunately, the obviousness of the symbolism doesn't mar Callis' effective performance.) And as often happens in this sort of epic, characters are given to flowery flights of speechifying.

However, the well-cast players infuse even borderline-campy dialogue with persuasive conviction. Sharif, in a small but key role, sounds aptly impassioned when he asks: "Is the past so mighty that we must destroy of brethren to escape its grasp?" And the mountainous Lister conveys an ineffably teddy-bearish likeability as he rumbles lines -- "You think a eunuch cannot know love?" -- that would choke most other actors.

Despite his prominent billing, Peter O'Toole appears in only one scene -- with a nicely explosive flash of righteous fury -- as the prophet Samuel.

As Esther/Hadassah, Dupont exudes charm, grace and (when necessary) gravitas, along with a hint of incipient star power. Goss is appropriately regal, Rhys-Davies is heartily formidable. Noble slices the ham generously as the hissy-worthy is Admantha.

Filmed on location in India, "One Night With the King" maintains a steady but never stodgy pace while flaunting an opulence that belies its reported \$20 million budget. Credit cinematographer [Steven Bernstein](#) ("Like Water for Chocolate"), costumer [Neeta Lulla](#) and production designer [Aradhana Seth](#) for providing sufficient movie magic to help revive a genre that, in recent years, has been relegated to broadcast and cable TV.

Camera (color, widescreen), [Steven Bernstein](#); editor, [Gabiella Cristiani](#); music, [J.A.C. Redford](#); production designer, [Aradhana Seth](#); costume designer, [Neeta Lulla](#); sound (Dolby Digital), [Tim Cooney](#); visual effects supervisor, [Ted Fay](#); assistant director, [John Nelson](#); casting, [Liz Lang](#). Reviewed on DVD, Houston, Oct. 10, 2006. MPAA Rating: PG. Running time: 123 MIN.

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