Immortals fight for your buck

The Highlander
Capitol Square

review by Shaun Cody

Highlander could have been a truly fine film. But poor attention to detail leaves it fatally flawed.

We first meet the mysterious Russell Nash (Christopher Lambert) attending a wrestling match in Madison Square Gardens. He leaves this arena of mock gladiators to fight a battle in deadly earnest with broad swords in the parking lot. After Nash decapitates his immaculately-clad opponent, the film flashes back to his origin. Nash was born in the 1500's, a Highland warrior known as Connor Macleod (hence his title the Highlander).

After the parking lot duel, the film flashes back to the Highlander's past. A battle in feudal Scotland shows Connor Macleod wandering about bemoaning the fact that no one will fight him. Moments later, he encounters his nemesis, the Kurgon. And Macleod wishes he had kept his mouth shut.

The Highlander is grievously wounded by the Kurgon, yet lives. His kin suspect him of being possessed by the devil and banish him. He then meets Ramirez. Ramirez is to the Highlander what Merlin was to King Arthur. Ramirez acts as a tutor, training the Highlander to fight the Kurgon.

The Highlander learns that he, Ramirez, the Kurgon, and a select few others are immortal warriors. They can only be killed when another immortal decapitates them. The Highlander learns from Ramirez that he will meet the remaining warriors sometime, somewhere in the future at the Gathering to battle for the Prize.

The Gathering is set in New York (where else?) in 1985. The film begins to weaken here. The Kurgon is as physically intimidating as Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator*. Although the Kurgon is not massively muscular, he is a natural giant who dwarfs his opponents. The face of the Kurgon also adds to the intimidation in its stark brutality. But the Kurgon clowns endlessly. Some nemesis. He becomes just another seven foot evil prankster. And the Kurgon, a pagan born on the Russian steppes 700 years before Christ,

(Above) Christopher Lambert as Connor Macleod manhandling the Kurgon (Clancy Brown)
(Right) Sean Connery as Ramirez bestowing advice upon Connor Macleod.

respects a Catholic Church as holy ground on which he will not fight. Why are Judeo-Christian places of worship considered sacred to warriors from all parts of the world and throughout time? Furthermore, why would these warriors, some persecuted by Christianity (Macleod) and all in contradiction to the entire weight of Christian theology, embrace Judeo-Christian morality?

The Prize, ultimate knowledge, seems useless and undesirable once won. The immortal becomes mortal again, able to die and procreate. Supposedly, it enables the winner to do great good by aiding world leaders in understanding each other. The point is, do they want to?

Highlander does show deep innovation and insight at times. The battle where the Kurgon wounds Macleod illustrates the true horror of medieval warfare. No knights and fair ladies here. Four men clad in filthy clothing drown an opponent in a bog. A monk stabs a man and then makes the sign of absolution over himself. Also, *Highlander* introduces a very spectacular method of changing scenes. One shot of a fish tank pans to

become the surface of a Scottish lake. But this technical trickery cannot save *Highlander*.

A film should have synergistic effect where the whole is more than the sum of the parts. In *Highlander*, the parts are great. The whole is ragged and doesn't wrap up the loose ends.