**Centurion**  
R  
97 Minutes  
Rating: ****1/2

There’s a new title available at the nation’s video outlets, a big-budget adventure film that for some inexplicable reason was only given a limited national release and quickly disappeared from the cinema scene a couple of months ago. Promotional mistakes aside, *Centurion* is a terrific movie, one that will hopefully find its niche in the home video market. Indeed, writer/director Neil Marshall and his outstanding cast and crew have given us one of the best all-round action films of the decade.

Set in the days of the Roman conquest of ancient Britain, *Centurion* is the story of Quintus Dias, a veteran soldier who is captured by the native Picts when his outpost is wiped out. Tortured and humiliated by his captors, Quintus escapes and is rescued by the Roman 9th Legion, a seemingly invincible army with orders to wipe the Picts out once and for all. But the Picts have a plan of their own, and soon Quintus and a small cohort of his fellow soldiers are once again fleeing for their lives from the ruthless barbarians. Can Quintus lead his men back to Roman lines and safety? Or will they fall prey to the vengeance of the Picts?

Flawlessly directed and choreographed, *Centurion* is an intense, often stunning film. The relentless battle scenes are bloody and deadly, and the movie’s powerful energy is underscored by a palpable thread of suspense. Cinematography is magnificent, highlighting the barren, snow-frosted mountains through which our characters must flee for their lives so that the wilderness becomes a character in itself. The acting is likewise first-rate on all counts, beginning with Michael Fassbender as the brave Quintus. Fassbender’s character engages viewer empathy from the outset, a thoughtful, war-weary man who for all his heroism remains eminently mortal. The supporting cast more than holds their own and features several prominent character actors, including Dominic West, Liam Cunningham, and Imogen Poots. But as fine as all these actors are, they are overshadowed by Olga Kurylenko as the merciless Pict huntress, Etain. Kurylenko, perhaps best known as a Bond girl, imbues her savage character with a chilling malevolence that is truly frightening to behold.

*Centurion* should have been a classic of the adventure genre. Even on the TV it is spectacular; on the big screen its gory vistas of the imagination must have been simply breathtaking. It is an action masterpiece.