

## FILM REVIEW

## OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW



# For the glory of Rome!

'Centurion' takes a stab at history and leaves a bloody mess

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

Neil Marshall has honed a reputation as a champion of British horror with classics such as *Dog Soldiers* (2002) and *The Descent* (2005), but his attempt to bring his bloody aesthetic to a larger canvass has produced a historical splatter movie of dubious appeal and limited interest.

The story takes as its starting point an attempt by the Roman empire to complete its conquest of Britain. This has been held up in the barbarous wilds of Scotland by Pictish warriors who engage in a guerrilla campaign of great cunning and savagery. The story is loosely based upon the destruction and disappearance of the Legio IX Hispana, one of Rome's most ruthlessly efficient fighting units that suddenly disappeared from the historical record in mysterious circumstances in the early part of the second century.

Quintus Dias (Michael Fassbender) is an officer stationed at a bleak and frozen frontier post who is captured by the Picts but manages to escape after meeting up with a Roman column (the

9th Legion) that is marching to destroy Pict resistance. He is welcomed as a source of local knowledge by the general Virilus (Dominic West), a fighting general eager to come to grips with his adversary.

The column is led into an ambush and cut down almost to a man. A few survivors remain, and the film follows seven of them, led by Dias, who try to escape through the wilderness. Hard on their heels is Etain, played by *Quantum of Solace* Bond girl Olga Kurylenko, who is out for vengeance for atrocities committed by the Roman army in her village. She sports what might be described as a folk-punk look, and is accompanied by other leggy woman warriors, who are doubtless there to cater to Marshall's core audience of young men, but seem a highly improbable addition to a Highland fighting force.

A strong cast that includes Michael Fassbender and Dominic West has plenty of potential to take the film into a more nuanced look at violent men under pressure, but Marshall has commercial interests at the forefront

## Film Notes

### CENTURION

DIRECTED BY:  
NEIL MARSHALL

STARRING:  
MICHAEL FASSBENDER (QUINTUS DIAS),  
DOMINIC WEST (VIRILUS),  
OLGA KURYLENKO (ETAIN), DAVID  
MORRISSEY (BOTHOS), JJ FELD (THAX),  
IMOGEN POOTS (ARIAN)

RUNNING TIME:  
97 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE:  
TODAY

of his mind. There is gory butchery aplenty as Etain and her posse take out the Romans one at a time, and the film degenerates rapidly into a not very exciting escape movie. Copious attention is paid to creating some decent fight sequences, but the

characters are too hastily drawn for us to feel much interest in their demise. The backdrop of wild Highland scenery, while undoubtedly beautiful, fails to generate the atmosphere of brooding foreboding that Marshall is trying for.

*Centurion* is further tarnished by a romantic interlude that brings in yet another bit of eye candy in the form of Arian (Imogen Poots), a woman living alone in the depths of the forest having been ostracized by the Picts for witchcraft. It's all a bit too convenient. The romance between Dias and Arian manages to blossom in a matter of seconds and just paves the way to wrap up the story with a sweet little bow.

*Centurion* has the same gore mixed with laddish humor as *Dog Soldiers*, which was a minor classic of new British horror, and Marshall is now covering similar ground with bigger names and bigger sets, but the humor has gone sour and the director's competence with spilled guts and decapitated heads is not enough in itself to make this film work.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CATCHPLAY



## Taipei Film Festival 2010

Starting today and running until July 15, the Taipei Film Festival (台北電影節) combines competition and exhibition elements. The festival, now in its 12th year, focuses on the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Shanghai, and also has other components to highlight new films from around Asia. The Taipei Awards section provides an opportunity to check out some of the better local feature films released this year. Three films each by directors Suzana Amaral and Hector Babenco, in the Directors in Focus component, will also be screened. Ticketing information and English-language information about the festival are available at [eng.taipeiff.org.tw/Default.aspx](http://eng.taipeiff.org.tw/Default.aspx).

## Knight and Day

This new Tom Cruise vehicle might be retitled "Mission Implausible," as agent Roy Miller breezes through a host of action set pieces while exchanging not very witty badinage with co-star Cameron Diaz. Special effects aim to be big but are found wanting, and the film also fails to pull off its sly nudge and wink that Cruise will win the day and get the girl. Talented cast, including Peter Sarsgaard and Jordi Mollà, is wasted as the script tries too hard to get laughs and doesn't bother with character development.



## Baaria

This epic story of an Italian family spanning three generations by director Giuseppe Tomatore, the creator of *Cinema Paradiso*, is beautiful to look at and full of sincere passion. The huge canvases that he takes on in *Baaria*, the slang name of the place in Sicily where he grew up and where much of the film is set, gets a bit cluttered, and the formal mastery of individual scenes fails to generate the narrative energy to carry the story through the 150 minutes of the film.



## Crows Zero 2

Sequel to a popular Japanese manga-based series about school punks fighting it out to be the coolest, meanest toughs on the street. This second installment revolves around a feud between rival gangs from two different schools, and there is plenty of bloody fight scenes and visceral violence. Amid the feuding flow numerous subplots catering to those who know the manga series, which ran for eight years, but they might prove confusing for newcomers.



## Mondovino

A long and sometimes rambling documentary on the wine industry providing revelations that not everything there is rosy, at least for those who prize individuality and character over the bottom line and the streamlining of taste. Director Jonathan Nossiter talks with major business leaders such as the Mondavi family (the world's biggest winemakers and the bug bear of many wine connoisseurs), opinion makers like wine critic Robert Parker, and wine growers and vintners both large and small on both sides of the globalization debate. A must-see for foodies.



## Solomon Kane

Low-budget fantasy film based on stories by pulp writer Robert Howard about a brutal mercenary who tries to renounce violence after a meeting with the devil. There is nevertheless lots of violence in *Solomon Kane*, which has been described as the film that *Van Helsing* (2004) might have been. Starring James Purefoy as a grizzled fighter and a very respectable ensemble including Pete Postlethwaite and Max von Sydow. Good B-movie entertainment unhampered by pretension.



## RESTAURANTS

BY CATHERINE SHU

### Allen & Dickson

Address: 24, Ln 40, Taishun St, Taipei City (台北市泰順街40巷24號)  
Open: Mondays to Thursdays 11:30am to 10pm,  
Fridays 11:30am to 11pm, weekends 9:30am to 11pm  
On the Net: [www.wretch.cc/album/allendickson](http://www.wretch.cc/album/allendickson)

Telephone: (02) 3365-2215  
Average meal: NT\$300 to NT\$400  
Details: Chinese and English menu,  
credit cards not accepted



Allen & Dickson's interior is all kitschy Americana, but its entrees are worse than okay. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Allen & Dickson, which recently opened its second location near Shida night market, looks like it could have served as a set in *Happy Days*, *Grease* or the first *Back to the Future* movie. Vintage ads for products like Aunt Jemima's pancake syrup, Coca Cola and a now-politically incorrect label for a frozen watermelon-flavored treat called Picaninny Freeze line the walls. At night, a disco ball shines on black-and-white checkered tablecloths and a chrome lunch counter. Classic rock hits add to the kitschy Americana atmosphere (though, according to the menu, the chain was founded after its owner spent some time cooking in Spain). Allen & Dickson's large menu features diner classics like all-day breakfasts, milk shakes and burgers — but the food doesn't quite live up to its colorful surroundings.

I hoped for a heart attack on a plate when I ordered the fettuccine with seafood and chicken in a creamy white wine sauce (NT\$280). The sauce, however, was bland and the mixed toppings, including a few pieces of crabmeat, shrimp and fish, were dominated by chunks of slightly dry chicken. On a separate visit, my companion ordered the Alice hamburger (NT\$240), topped with grilled onions, mushroom and cheese. The patty was small and just as forgettable as my pasta dish had been, and the bun was a little too sweet. Burgers are served with

French fries, mashed potato or cheese bites. My companion ordered the mashed potato, but the two lumps on his plate were almost unrecognizable. They looked like fritters and it was only after a bite that I realized they were actually two very small scoops of slightly undercooked smashed potatoes with the skin left on. My entree, sizzling chicken and shrimp (NT\$260), was also supposed to come with a side of mashed potato, but the pulverized tater pile was actually served underneath chicken strips (just as dry as they had been in the pasta), bacon bits and shrimp. Everything was smothered in melted cheese on a sizzling cast iron plate. The dish was greasy to the point of being almost unpalatable and I wished I'd ordered the "homemade health seafood porridge" (NT\$200), one of the few items on the menu targeted to calorie-conscious diners.

Our meals were disappointing, but we fared better with dessert. The

fried ice cream with cinnamon and caramel (NT\$160) is a big scoop of vanilla ice cream served in a crunchy fried pastry shell and smothered in whipped cream, loads of cinnamon and caramel sauce. The flavors combined to taste like Cinnamon Crunch cereal. The chocolate caramel brownie sundae (NT\$170) was also good, with the gooey brownie served hot, all the better to let the vanilla ice cream melt around it in a decadent puddle. Other offerings include the fried banana cheese bite sundae (NT\$160) and a banana split (NT\$260) for three to five people.

Allen & Dickson's also offers pizza, a brunch menu that consists mostly of omelets, a selection of milk shakes (including peanut butter, Oreo and toffee) and cocktails, including a 30-ounce margarita for NT\$350. The entrees might not live up to the restaurant's lively interior, but Allen & Dickson's sweets menu just might past the Ponz's scrutiny.

### No. 19 Cafe (19號水岸咖啡館)

Address: 19, Ln 131, Jingshan Rd, Taipei City (台北市菁山路131巷19號)  
Average meal: Meal: NT\$300 to NT\$500 per person  
On the Net: [tw.myblog.yahoo.com/no19cafe](http://tw.myblog.yahoo.com/no19cafe)  
Details: Chinese menu, credit cards not accepted

Yangmingshan offers a few nice summer afternoon getaways in addition to shady forests and breezy pastures. The No. 19 Cafe (19號水岸咖啡館), located a leisurely three-hour walk from Cing Tian Gang (擎天崗), sits among a scattered cluster of mid-priced cafes and restaurants catering to weary hikers and city dwellers out for a drive in the mountains.

Those who follow the bright yellow hand-painted signs that dot Jingshan Road (菁山路) to No. 19 are rewarded with country home comfort and rustic charm. Lounge around in the cafe's open and spacious dining area, a converted one-story house fitted with a long row of large French doors that stay open to let the breeze in, as well as the occasional butterfly. The space has a homey, lived-in feel, with well-worn wooden floors, floral tablecloths and plush sofas placed in front of a stone fireplace — just the setting for a pot of Earl Grey (NT\$170) or an organic herbal tea (NT\$200 to NT\$210).

Or sit in the shade at tables next to the outdoor bar and listen to a small brook that runs by the cafe. Unfortunately the food was a letdown — it was more on par with an overpriced student cafe rather than a mountain retreat. The country garden vegetables (田園鮮蔬義大利麵, NT\$290), usually served with pasta (we had rice instead), were doused with an overly

sweet tomato sauce that tasted like it either came from a can or was made with ketchup.

The seafood pasta with pesto (青醬海鮮義大利麵, NT\$350) would pass the taste test for a hungry hiker, but not a lover of Italian food. The pesto was thin and watery and too salty, while the pasta was cooked too al dente. The dish was tossed with several unshelled prawns, clams and calamari, which didn't help with the overall appearance. At least the prawns tasted fresh.

Other main course choices include the barbecue pork steak with rice (碳烤香茅豬排, NT\$360) or the Spanish red wine chicken stew with rice (西班牙紅酒燴雞, NT\$350). For dessert, don't bother with the "homemade" chocolate and green tea cookies (NT\$100), which were hard and didn't taste homemade. A safer bet might be the waffles topped with chocolate or honey (NT\$130).

Although the mediocre food hinders No. 19's appeal as a dinner date destination, the idyllic surroundings still make for an attractive escape from the swelter of the city. It's easy to imagine returning to spend an afternoon there with a book or even a laptop (but you'll need a personal 3G connection for surfing the Internet as there is no Wi-Fi).

The coffee is decent. No. 19 uses siphon brewers instead of espresso machines. Its selection includes Brazilian (NT\$200), Sumatra Mandheling



You'll need to work up a good appetite to appreciate the food at No. 19 Cafe. PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

(NT\$220) and Blue Mountain (NT\$220) blends. The plain iced coffee (NT\$170) is flavorful and packs enough of a punch to consider another hike.

If you plan to drive directly there, the cafe's blog (in Chinese only) has directions with photos ([bit.ly/crZEj6](http://bit.ly/crZEj6)).

On public transport, the cafe recommends taking bus 303 from Jiantan MRT Station (劍潭捷運站) to the stop marked "International TV Station" (國際電台) — you'll see several larger-than-life satellite dishes in the area. From there, follow the cafe's hand-painted signs.

For hikers, one leisurely itinerary could start with a visit to Cing Tian Gang (擎天崗), a popular spot that has a path (mostly downhill) leading to the Jyuansih Waterfall (消絲瀑布), about 2.5km away. Continue on the path towards the Jyuansih Waterfall Entrance (消絲瀑布入口) on Jingshan Road, Lane 101. From there you can take bus 303 to "International TV Station," and follow the signs to No. 19 Cafe. Or just walk the whole distance — it should take about an hour. Either way, before you go, it's best to consult a map to plan your route.

From Shilin MRT Station (士林捷運站), take bus S15 (小15), which goes directly to Cing Tian Gang.

BY DAVID CHEN