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Category: Home > Reviews > Action > Adventure > Sword > Italy > Gladiators Seven (1968) + Hercules & The Masked Riders (1964) + Hercules & The Tyrant Of Babylon (1964/Cheezy Flicks DVDs)

MARKET PLACE

Gladiators Seven (1968) + Hercules & The Masked Riders (1964) + Hercules & The Tyrant Of Babylon (1964/Cheezy Flicks DVDs)

Picture: C-/D/D Sound: C- Extras: C- Films: C-

The 1960s was the end of the line for Sword & Sandal adventures and three films show why: **Gladiators Seven** (1968), **Hercules & The Masked Riders** (aka **Hercules Against Rome**/1964) and **Hercules & The Tyrant Of Babylon** (1964). While the big budget films were played out, B-movie producers from the U.S. to Italy churned them out to get quick money out of them. The former is a lame **Spartacus** (1960) rip off, while the other two are part of a long and usually unconnected line of Hercules films.

Tony Russel is the would-be hero of **Seven**, which was produced in Italy and makes him one of the only non-Italians on or off screen. It is bad, has dated badly and was not that good to begin with. This one is for diehard fans of these films only.

That leaves us with two different playing Hercules and who just happen to have their films both arrive in 1964. Sergio Ciani was in **Riders**, while future **Mission: Impossible** star Peter Lupus fared better in **Tyrant** simply by looking much more like the character and having a build that was larger and has not dated since bodybuilders became permanently integrated into action film in the 1980s.

Riders is slightly less amusing, but has enough campy moments to save it from being a total dud, though Ciani would play him one more time in another film issued later that year. Lupus (credited as Rock Stevens) only played him once, but is not in his film enough for it to really work, for whatever reason, but Tyrant has a better pace and Lupus is one of the best-cast actors still to this day to play the role.

The letterboxed 2.35 X 1 image on **Seven** is very weak with aliasing errors and major definition issues, while 1.33 X 1 image in both **Hercules** releases are disasters, looking like fading TV prints with image area missing on all sides; especially since they were 2.35 X1 TotalScope productions. The PCM 16/48 2.0 Mono in all cases is aged, rough and not so impressive. Add the dubbing and you get some bad sound work throughout all of them. Trailers and Intermission shorts are the only extras in all cases.

- Nicholas Sheffo

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