

# Tristan & Isolde (2006)

Rated R. Our ratings: V-6 ; L-1; S/N-4 . Running time: 2 hours 5 min.

*Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,  
but a faithful man who can find?*

*Proverbs 20:6 And forgive us our debts, as we also have  
forgiven our debtors.*

*Matthew 6:12*

Can you imagine a time when the Irish dominated the British Islands, well at least the western portion? Yes, the Irish, the people who later on spent so many centuries and buckets of blood in breaking away from the harsh English yoke! This was the case during the so-called Dark Ages, at least according to screenwriter Dean Georgaris and director Kevin Reynolds's intriguing romantic film *Tristan and Isolde*. This, of course is not Wagner's version, but Hollywood's, so the love triangle is not quite so hopeless, but the lovers nonetheless could be said to be star-crossed.

The story opens in "the Dark Ages" with an army of the Irish King Donnchadh (David Patrick O'Hara) coming ashore of Britannia, now that the Romans have vacated the land. They attack, plunder, and kill a great many, including the parents of young Tristan. They would have killed him too, but for the

intervention of Marke (Rufus Sewell), who loses one of his hands in saving the boy. He takes the boy and raises him along with his own son. Marke emerges as a leader trying to bring off an alliance of the other kings of western Britain. When Irish raiders again attack, the now grown Tristan (James Franco) is one of the most skilled and fiercest of the defenders, managing to kill the Irish general before he himself is cut down in the fierce fighting.

Thinking him dead, Tristan's comrades place his body in a funeral boat, pushing away from shore after setting it afire. Fortunately they are not very good at building the fire, the flames going out as the ship is carried west to Ireland, where it washes up and overturns, depositing Tristan upon the rocky shore of Ireland. There the daughter of King Donnchadh, Isolde (Sophia Myles), unhappy that her father is forcing her into a marriage with the Irish general that had gone off on the raid, is walking along the shore, when she sees the washed up body. Discovering that he is alive, she orders her disapproving maid to help her drag the body up and into a cave, where she warms him with her own body and, over a period of weeks, nurses him back to health. The two become acquainted over those days, but she will not give him her true name—nor does she know that her betrothed had been killed by this same man. Then, when her father's retainers find the wrecked ship and start searching for its occupant, she helps Tristan, whom she now loves, to another boat, to escape back to his land. No time for a farewell or the disclosure of her name.

Back home Tristan's people look at him as one returned from the dead, and Mark and his own son are excited and pleased to welcome him back. There follows a series of events that include Tristan returning to Ireland to fight for the hand of the Irish King's daughter. After learning of the death of his general, King Donnchadh drafts a crafty plan to entice the British kings to enter into a combat staged by himself for the hand of his daughter, supposedly to forge an alliance. His

plot involves producing such jealousy from the other kings toward the winner that they will begin fighting among themselves, thus enabling him to come in and conquer them. His biggest fear has been that the ambitious kings will find a way to settle their differences and unite behind one man.

Not knowing the identity of the veiled Isolde, Tristan fights on behalf of Marke. After a series of exciting encounters, he emerges victorious, but his sense of triumph is wiped away by the revelation that the woman whose hand in marriage he has won for his king is the same woman who had saved his life and given herself to him. There follows a long period of torment for them both when they journey back across the sea and the grateful Marke takes Isolde as his wife. Similar to the tale of King Arthur, Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, the film becomes the tale of divide loyalties and betrayals, climaxing in a battle royal in which redemption and forgiveness figure mightily. This is a much better film than the usual sword and armor epic.

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