

Despite its flaws, Christopher Robin makes a favorable impression

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««« out of ««««

Running Time: 104 minutes

It's been only months since we last saw a drama based around the world of writer A.A. Milne and his honey-guzzling bear, Winnie-the-Pooh. The latest version, *Christopher Robin*, takes a decidedly fictionalized approach, delving into the literature for inspiration and updating events to tell a story about the adult version of the boy featured in the famous tales. Director Marc Forster (*Neverland*

, *Stay, Stranger Than Fiction*

, *Quantum of Solace*

) is much more attracted to the somber aspects of the characters.

It has been about thirty years since Christopher Robin (Ewan McGregor) spent his days playing with Winnie-the-Pooh and his friends in the Hundred Acre Wood. In the time since, he has become a buttoned-down Efficiency Expert at a cash-strapped London luggage manufacturer. The rigid businessman is more concerned with work than his wife (Haley Atwell) and daughter (Bronte Carmichael). He gets the surprise of his life after Winnie-the-Pooh (Jim Cummings) appears, lost and concerned about the disappearances of Piglet (Nick Mohammed), Eeyore (Brad Garrett) and others in the forest, as well as the unending gray skies plaguing his home.

The approach makes this picture a little gloomier and more downcast than the usual Disney

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fare, but it's a different tactic and one that certainly suits its characters. And those animals... they look phenomenal. Winnie and the others are rendered to look like walking, talking stuffed animals and it works incredibly well. There's a wonderful texture and expressiveness to them that really helps. Once Robin is tasked with taking Winnie from London to Hundred Acre Wood, the movie comes alive, as the adult wanders the streets conversing with an easily distracted stuffed toy while trying not to attract onlookers.

Robin's interactions with Eeyore provide the film's most enjoyable sequences. From the moment he's rediscovered while floating listlessly down a stream towards a waterfall, just about every fatalistic comment from the chronically depressed donkey earns a laugh. The climax, which takes its characters into the city, is also impressive to behold. A lot of credit should be given to McGregor as well. Much of his role involves interacting with animals that simply aren't there and while he shares the screen with the characters, one completely believes the interactions between them.

However, there are some issues. The film is slow going early on and the heavy tone may make youngsters squirm in their seats. In fact, this story seems more suited to adults than children. And yet, the script is less than subtle. Its overarching theme is about the importance of doing "nothing" and how trivial pursuits can often lead to wonderful insight and new ideas.

This is a nice point and initially the events deliver it in a subtle manner, but by the last act the characters are repeating the moral explicitly and repeatedly. The resolution also feels like it has been given a Disney make-over, tying things up too neatly; it feels somewhat out of place with the preceding events. More introspection and specific change from the lead about his career might have made a bigger impact.

This movie doesn't wow in the way that another recent talking bear adaptation does (namely, the *Paddington* series). Then again, these animal characters and their human friend aren't presenting ideals for us all to follow. Instead, they are simply attempting to cope and survive nagging psychological issues and inner turmoil. That's quite an unusual mission for a group of stuffed animals. *Christopher Robin* is imperfect and uneven, yet there's enough in the middle of the movie to impress and ultimately make a favorable impression.

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