

'The Kid Who Would Be King' delivers a bit of magic

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

Running Time: 120 minutes

January is often a month for misfit films that, for one reason or another, studios don't have a lot of confidence in. However, there are always a few exceptions to the rule.

This week sees the release of *The Kid Who Would Be King*, a children's film and loose, modern adaptation of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. This unlikely amalgamation of *Excalibur* and *Goosebumps* ends up working much better than anticipated. In fact, it can be crowned an enjoyable and entertaining family film.

An impressive animated intro gives a brief history of King Arthur and tells viewers that when civility and honor are replaced in the world by hatred and greed, the legend will return.

Alex (Louis Ashbourne Serkis) is a youngster who spends his days with best friend Bedders (Dean Chaumoo), doing their best at school to avoid the wrath of bullies Lance (Tom Taylor) and Kaye (Rhianna Doris).

When he finds a sword embedded in concrete at a local construction site, Alex soon learns he may have discovered Excalibur. His worries are confirmed when a Young Merlin (Angus Imrie)

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arrives, who explains that not only is the evil sorceress Morgana (Rebecca Ferguson) ready to take over the world, but that Alex is the only person who can stop her.

Writer/Director Joe Cornish (*Attack the Block*) knows his way around monsters and comedy and seems quite at ease in establishing the various elements. In fact, the first act is particularly effective. Both Alex and Bedders are extremely likable with good comic timing, often reacting in amusing ways to the oddities occurring around them. It's quite funny to see the young lead try to stuff his magical sword in his backpack.

There are also some good jokes involving modern and unexpected updated locations for elements of the original legend (like the Round Table itself).

Young Merlin also provides a few laughs, delivering much of the film's exposition with plenty of energy. A particularly good gag results when the wizard reveals that he needs several buggy and slimy ingredients for spells and to maintain his health, which end up being easily attainable at a local fast-food chain. And the older-looking version of the character (Patrick Stewart) shows up occasionally to deliver a comical line or two.

The screenplay also tries to insert some positive themes into the story, forcing young Alex not to fight, but rather persuade others to follow his lead (an especially difficult task for the put-upon youngster given that he is less-than-popular with schoolmates).

The special effects are also impressive for a small, U.K. production; the undead knights serving Morgana are striking as they ride around on horseback chasing the students.

Admittedly, this film is longer than it needs to be. And although the sinister soldiers do look impressive, the action begins to feel a bit repetitive toward the end of the second act.

Had the budget allowed it, the movie could have used some other supernatural entities entering the fray.

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However, things pick up once again during the climax as Morgana and her army attack the lead's school, requiring all students to put aside their differences and take on an invading force.

While King Arthur adaptations are a dime a dozen, this film presents a unique and appealing twist on the formula.

It is fairly safe to say that *The Kid Who Would Be King* will thrill most children and likely provide an odd laugh or two for their parents. In the end, it appears that every now and again, January *can* deliver a little bit of movie magic.

By Glenn Kay

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