

Pan is a visually spectacular jumble

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<< *out of 4 stars*

Running Time: 111 minutes

Ever wondered how Peter Pan ended up in Neverland? I didn't either, but a new film aspires to tell the story of the young boy who travels to a magical land and learns to fly. Pan is a marvel to look at, with imaginative adventure scenarios that feature stunning visuals. However, story wise, this is a hodge-podge of ideas that never quite gel. Kids may still enjoy the wild imagery, but most adults will likely be left scratching their heads.

Set during World War II, Peter (Levi Miller) is a boy living in a London orphanage under the stern rule of Mother Barnabas (Kathy Burke). One night, while the city is being shelled, she raises a pirate flag. Blackbeard (Hugh Jackson) arrives on a flying ship, stealing Peter to work mining pixie-dust to keep him young. While there, Peter learns of a prophecy suggesting that he will fly and lead a revolt against the nefarious buccaneer. But to do this, he must overcome his crippling fear of heights.

If it already sounds like a chaotic jumble, it is. In the first thirty minutes alone, the film speeds from the kids trying to get the better of their nasty, food-hoarding keeper, to battles in the sky between pirate ships and the RAF, and then to the cast unexpectedly breaking into a musical rendition of Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" and The Ramones' "Blitzkrieg Bop" oddly enough, the musical elements are abandoned almost as suddenly as they are introduced. It possesses an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink feel, as though every production meeting idea was thrown into a bouillabaisse.

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The film is certainly larger than life and appears aimed primarily at children. Miller is likable and understated as the title character, but he's surrounded by performances that will strike adults as anything, but subtle. Blackbeard is like something out of Kabuki Theater. He's loud, exaggerated and his costuming and hairstyle is as over-the-top as some of his mannerisms. And when his motivations are revealed, I don't even think that it makes sense. He appears to want to wipe out a species, even though they produce the substance that keeps him young and alive.

Pan also befriends James Hook (Garrett Hedlund), who possesses an odd southern drawl that sounds like it was dubbed in post-production. The Neverland production design is equally overloaded, with environments that look like a cross between Mad Max: Fury Road and Jurassic World (with giant, attacking skeletal birds to boot).

Despite all the strangeness, there is something, oddly fascinating, about it all. Generally, I enjoy the films of director Joe Wright (Hanna, Anna Karenina) and like all of his films this is a finely polished work, with many unique and interesting touches. There are a few minor lines and gags early on that are particularly funny.

And the images themselves look stunning. The 3D effects are excellent and feature elements in all areas of the frame. It's hyperactive and aggressive, in its visual assault, and for that reason alone it's never boring. Viewers will even have the opportunity to see a weightless floating chicken lay an egg that flies out of the screen because, well... why not? In the end, it all looks lavish and expensive. You can see every cent on the screen.

Due to the wild and jarring approach with bizarre changes in tone from act to act, I can only imagine that this was a difficult production that may have been reworked a few times over. It must have gone through a series of re-shoots. The credits list two directors of photography, which certainly suggests it. Kids probably won't notice these issues, and enjoy Pan for what it is. As an adult, it's a mess, but I'll give it some points for being a wild and crazily surreal misfire.