Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 12 August 2016 00:36



Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 102 min.

As a reviewer, you see all kinds of films in various different genres. Sometimes in the kids’ flick category, there are features in which the characters speak especially slowly, almost pouring over every syllable. It’s obvious the makers and performers are specifically aiming the material at youngsters. Some of these movies are decent, some are not, but I’ve come to call them “slow-talkers.”

This week, Disney has a slow-talker coming your way. To be fair, *Pete’s Dragon* is a nicely produced, well-intentioned, and perfectly genial family film. It’s likely to please the children, although a few adults in the audience (specifically, me) may find it tame.

Additionally, the gauzy stares, long pauses, and slow line delivery from adults is a bit... well... unsettling. Clearly, the tone is supposed to feel warm and affectionate, and it will work for many, but the stiff behavior of some characters left this viewer wondering if he was watching members of some sort of cult.

The story follows a considerably different path than the original 1977 film. Pete (Oakes Fegley) is a child who finds himself alone and lost in the wilderness of the Pacific Northwest. Pete’s discovered by Elliott, a fuzzy dragon with the power of invisibility, who helps him survive.

After living feral for six years, Pete is discovered by a forest ranger named Grace (Bryce Dallas Howard), who takes the kid in to live with her lumber-mill owner boyfriend Jack (Wes Bentley) and daughter Natalie (Oona Lawrence). The boy’s encounters with a dragon catch the attention of Jack’s brother, Gavin (Karl Urban), who wants to catch the mythic creature.

This is a very, very gentle movie. While the draw may be a wild dragon, don’t expect a lot of fire breathing or conflict.

Elliott, for all intents and purposes, is an oversized dog. Both he and Pete are lost and searching for their families, forming a makeshift partnership in the woods. When Grace arrives, much time is spent with the ranger attempting to figure out the boy’s identity (which will be of no mystery to the audience) and integrating him back into society.

The movie also attempts to present an environmental message about leaving nature as it is (or at least the dragons therein). It’s a noble message, but the simplicity of the presentation is too slight; the protagonist’s convictions need to be tested on a more dramatic level.

As mentioned previously, the characters occasionally come across as overly warm and exceedingly earnest. Grace’s father Meacham (Robert Redford) is the saving grace among the human characters. He gives the most naturalistic performance in the film, joking around with the youngsters and imparting the themes to young viewers without coming across as precious or patronizing. One wishes he were more present in the film; the actor only appears in the opening moments and the final half-hour.

One element that isn’t as strong is the 3D. This is a post-conversion job and it looks it. There are only a handful of shots that feature any depth at all (an overhead angle gazing down from a bridge, the occasional flying angle from the air). Otherwise, you’ll barely be able to notice it. Even worse, the glasses darken the image, making some scenes look dimmer and dirtier than they should.

If you do decide to check out the film, see it in 2D.

Pete’s Dragon is an acceptable kids’ film that will serve its target audience reasonably well. However, adults nostalgic for the original, or those who wander in impulsively, won’t find it nearly as gripping. Some movies are made for the entire family — while decent overall, this one is exclusively for children.

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