

'The King's Daughter' is a fractured fantasy

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «

out of «««««

Running Time:
96 minutes

Gravitas Ventures will release this film in theaters on Jan. 21.

It's easy to forget just how difficult it is to produce and create a feature film. There are so many moving parts and factors involved, it's a wonder that so many aren't just completed, but are also effective and engaging. "The King's Daughter" serves as a case in point as to how things can go sideways. This movie was shot back in 2014 by a major studio, but ended up being shelved.

After several years, another distributor has picked it up and is putting it in theaters. Admittedly, the film is impressive in a few respects and is a fascinating watch, but perhaps not in the way it was originally intended.

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Loosely based on the 1997 novel “The Moon and the Sun,” this period fable begins with a lengthy backstory explained in voice-over by a narrator (Julie Andrews). She explains that after an assassination made on French leader, King Louis XIV (Pierce Brosnan), the figure starts to fear losing his life and power. He then hears rumors that finding and sacrificing a magical creature from the sea will give him immortality. So, Louis XIV sends his best sailor Yves De La Croix (Benjamin Walker) to catch a Mermaid (Fan Bingbing).

As if that wasn’t enough trouble, the King also hates the composer chosen to play music each morning when he awakens. A talented, but impoverished youth named Marie-Josèphe (Kaya Scodelario) arrives at the royal palace to pen more pleasing melodies. She impresses Louis XIV, but also learns about the Mermaid imprisoned onsite and decides to help her. Marie-Josèphe also has a mysterious history, although that secret will be obvious to anyone aware of the film’s title.

As noted, it is evident that this film went through a troubled post-production. Clearly, a great deal more footage was shot than was actually used in the finished product. The story races through a lot of background information early on and introduces not just the leads, but numerous individuals including staff members in a remarkably short amount of time (many of whom ultimately fade into the background). It jumps around so much early on that the viewers will be scratching their heads trying to understand what is happening and the motivations of each thinly-drawn character.

There’s a strange focus on Louis XIV, even though he is essentially the antagonist. A great deal of footage follows him marching around his grounds in full pomp and acting ostentatiously. It leaves little time to get to know protagonist Marie-Josèphe, who suddenly appears at the palace and adapts with ease despite being thrust into a very strange situation. After an incredibly brief amount of time with Yves De La Croix, she falls head over heels for the sailor and soon wants to drop everything to be with her new man.

Marie-Josèphe’s remarkable musical composition skills are eventually forgotten and instead seem like a plot device to get the main character to the palace.

One can make the excuse that this is a kid’s film and that the writing and performances are campy and overplayed for the benefit of younger viewers. But once again, there are strange

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elements that would suggest otherwise. This includes Louis XIV making jokes about the different women whom he takes to bed each night and can’t remember. With the rapid pacing and choppiness between fantasy sequences involving the Mermaid, the earnest Marie-Josèphe finding her true love and the exaggerated depictions of real figures like King Louis XIV, it’s impossible to know what was intended.

The movie’s tone is all over the place and it ultimately comes across as silly.

At least there’s one positive and that is the impressive locations. This feature appears to have been shot in part around the actual Palace of Versailles. As a result, viewers are treated to stunning images of the site’s staggeringly lavish interiors and exteriors. In fact, there are numerous scenes with the characters unnecessarily wandering and conversing in the building and gardens, seemingly trying to get every bit of production value they can out of the incredible backdrop.

The constructed sets also look good, including the underground cave with an elaborate underwater chamber where the Mermaid is confined.

“The King’s Daughter” is a lavish-looking movie and youngsters may not care that the story and characters aren’t well written. For adults, this film is something of a disaster. But at least this reviewer can say he was never bored watching it and those looking for a very cheesy time at the movies may be amused by this unintentionally bizarre and fractured fantasy.

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