

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

A film review by S and S Taylor (Originally written for New Zealand, Methodist Taonga, December 2005. Reprinted with their permission.)

Equipped with pencil, pad and probing review questions, eight year old Shannon Taylor took her father, Steve, to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The following film review is a family affair.

Four children leave their home in war-torn Britain and travel to the sprawling house of a country Professor. Playing hide and seek, Lucy discovers a wardrobe. Inside is the magical world of Narnia, with walking fawns and talking animals. The four Pevensie children are caught in a battle between good and evil, a nasty witch and a majestic lion.

The film is based on the book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by CS Lewis. It has special appeal for New Zealand viewers, being both set in New Zealand and directed by New Zealander Andrew Adamson (who has earned critical acclaim for his family animation movies *Shrek* and *Shrek 2*).

The children win our hearts and the computer animations work seamlessly to bring the centaurs and satyrs, the fawns and minotaurs, to believable life. Aslan is both a loveable pussy cat and an untamed king. The sound track is hauntingly beautiful and the battle scenes are epic. The film is scary at times, so 8 year old Shannon insists children need to have an adult with them.

Careful book readers will be pleased with a movie that by and large remains faithful to Lewis's magical imagination. Adamson's additions work well. The opening scene provides a helpful context for twenty-first century viewers. Edmund's betrayal is heightened as he faces Mr Tumnus in the witches' dungeon. Meeting the wolves as the children cross the frozen river increases the sense of danger.

More critically, I wonder if an introductory filmic summary of the deep magic of Narnia would have helped a viewer unfamiliar with the imagination of Lewis. Similarly, a lack of visual clues in the arrival of Santa could confuse movie goers unfamiliar with the book.

Christian viewers will be pleased with a movie that remains faithful to Christian themes of sin, forgiveness and redemption. Indeed, in a culture losing touch with the Christian story, the movie offers the church meaningful connection points. The church I pastor ran a "Take a Kid to Faith; Lion, Witch, Wardrobe" church service leading up to Christmas and enjoyed media coverage and visitor attendance. (More details are available on my website by searching at http://www.emergentkiwi.org.nz/archives/cat_narnia.php). However, the theology offered by the movie does need to be handled with care. In places it is medieval in tone and nature. Adult theological viewers need to ponder the extent to which the blood lust of the witch is a true understanding of Christian love.

Overall, the film works well. It is a family movie that will captivate your child. It is a special effects spectacular and another triumph for the New Zealand film industry. It offers an imaginative exploration of the Christian story.

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