The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

PG

113 Minutes

Rating: ****

The third live-action film in The Chronicles of Narnia series, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader takes us back to magical Narnia along with Lucy and Edmund Pevensie (Georgie Hensley and Skandar Keynes, respectively). Fans of the series will remember Lucy and Edmund from the previous entries, but their elder siblings, Susan and Peter, don’t make the trip with them this time. Instead, they are joined by their cantankerous, spoiled cousin Eustace (Will Poulter). Eustace has heard about Narnia from his cousins before, but he always believed it was all a fairy tale. And even when a picture in his house miraculously spouts water and carries the three of them off to Narnia and a providential rendezvous with their old friend Prince Caspian and his vessel, the Dawn Treader, he still refuses to believe any of it is real. But Narnia is its own reality, and this time the Pevensie children will have to overcome the evil within their own hearts if they are to return home alive.

Whereas the previous films in the series, The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe and Prince Caspian were family films, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader is more of an outright children’s movie. The violence and occasionally dark interludes from the other movies have been consciously toned down, though the underlying morality tale and spiritual element of the original novels by Christian apologist C.S. Lewis remains. The script is a thoughtful one, and it explores the ease with which temptation insinuates itself into our minds and yet how terribly difficult it can be to shrug off. Forgiveness and patience are lauded as virtues, and the reality of both absolute Good and absolute Evil is asserted in very unambiguous terms. As with the other Narnia films, redemption is a major theme, and of course the magical lion who is the King of Narnia, Aslan (still voiced with unimpeachable authority by Liam Neeson) continues to overshadow everything that happens even when he doesn’t seem to be around.

But if The Voyage of the Dawn Treader is a kids’ film, it is an excellent one…and one that indeed adults can and will enjoy as well. The special effects are brilliant, the sets fantastic, and the acting heartfelt. Throw in a timeless religious message, and you have a perfect holiday treat.