

Kubo and the Two Strings (2016)

Rated PG. Running time: 1 hour 41 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 4; Language 0; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 5

*He said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel:
Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord
of hosts.*

Zechariah 4:6

*Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the
whole world,*

what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Mark 14:9

Portland Oregon's Laika Studio has given us animated films that seem as oriented to adults as to children—think *Coraline*, *The Boxtrolls*, and *ParaNorman*. Their latest, directed by the company's CEO Travis Knight is about a one-eyed boy in ancient Japan living with his mother in a cave atop a cliff overlooking a fishing village. The two are in hiding from their family, his grandfather the Moon King having stolen one of the boy's eye when he was a baby. Her two sisters and the grandfather are currently looking for them so he can snatch the other eye. She tells her son that as long as he returns home from the village before midnight they are safe. Although the possessor of great magic, her memory comes and goes.

Kubo goes into the village each day where he earns their living by playing his traditional lute-like instrument called a shamisen. He tells, no, he conjures up stories by transforming his origami papers into samurai warriors and monsters. Naturally, he is a big hit with the townspeople. His troubles begin when he stays out past the fall of darkness, and the evil sisters find him.

The rest of the film is a Joseph Campbellian Hero's Quest to find the lost armor and sword of his deceased father Hanzo. He has two companions, Monkey and Beetle, the former brought to life from the small carved wooden monkey he possessed, and Beetle, once a samurai who claims to have been apprenticed to the boy's father. He has been living under a curse, his body being both human and beetle. There is lots of bantering back and forth as well as thrilling action as they overcome one obstacle after another.

This is one of the most beautiful so-called children's films of the year, the stop-motion animation set amidst spectacular backdrops. I was reminded of Luke Skywalker in *Return of the Jedi* at one point when Kubo lays aside his sword and armor. We learn that the two strings in the title do not refer to any of the three-stringed shamisen, but rather, to the bracelet of hair the boy wears on his wrist, the hair symbolizing the love of his mother. Along with love, story telling and memory are also important themes in the film. The voice talent, starts with Art Parkinson as Kubo and includes those of Charlize Theron, Art Parkinson, Ralph Fiennes, Rooney Mara, George Takei, Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, Brenda Vaccaro, Matthew McConaughey—a VERY impressive cast for a VERY impressive film. The film is very dark in places, so parents of young children should see it before taking them—but there is so much to see in this stunning film, that you will be glad to see it a second time.

This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the September issue of VP.

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