

The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep (2007)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- 4; L-1 ; S/N-1. Running time: 1 hr. 51 min

*O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
Psalm 104:24-26*

This formulaic film, sort of a Angus takes the ride of his Scottish Free Willy, should believe on Crusoe.

welcomed by families looking for something to watch together. It ²⁰⁰⁷ Soney Pictures

is the early 1940s, and 12 year-old Angus MacMorrow (Alex Etel, the engaging star of Millions) has yet to come to terms with the reality that his absent father has died in the war. He visits regularly the work shed where, like a shrine, he has tacked to the wall photos of his father, news clippings, and a map showing the progress of the war. In several flashbacks we see their close relationship and his father's telling him that he will have to be "the man of the family" while he is gone. His

mother Anne (Emily Watson) as head mistress runs the large estate as well as keeping watch over Angus and his older sister Kirstie (Priyanka Xi). Assisting Anne is handyman and gardener Lewis Mowbray (Ben Chapin), seemingly distant at first in his demeanor, but who after a while befriends the lonely boy.

The peaceful life of the estate is soon interrupted by the arrival of an artillery contingent led by the self-important Capt. Hamilton (David Morrissey), convinced that the German U-boats are lurking offshore, set to lead the invasion at the strategic point where the Loch Ness enters the sea. (The film, actually shot in New Zealand, takes liberty with the fact that the real Loch Ness is a landlocked fresh water lake.) The men suspect that the Captain has drawn this assignment to escape real combat. Very class conscious, the Captain discounts the working class Lewis as soon as they meet, casting aspersions on his manhood because he is still a civilian. We suspect better of the latter because we have glimpsed the ugly scars across his back—and of course, we finally learn that he had been severely wounded while fighting the enemy.

An even more disruptive event alters the life of Angus, though it begins in a small way with his finding a large barnacle-encrusted egg on the beach. Taking it home, he cares for it, until it hatches a cute little creature with a very long neck and flipper like appendages. Fearing that his mom will not allow him to keep it, he hides it in the work shed. But every few days it grows enormously, so that keeping it in a bucket is no longer possible. The scene in which it escapes and is chased by a soldier's pet bull dog is a classic comic scene, the two creatures wreaking havoc on the dinner party that the stuffy Captain is throwing in honor of Anne. So is the scene

in which Kirstie meets Crusoe (as Angus has named the creature, after the hero of one of his books) as she is about to take a bath, discovering that the tub already has an occupant. Lewis, drawn by her shrieks, joins brother and sister, and both agree to keep Angus's secret.

Crusoe is as playful as E.T., but soon surpasses the size of the little alien. Lewis helps Angus transport it to the Loch, where the ever growing creature expands to the size of a whale, becoming much like the Leviathan that the Psalmist describes as "sporting" in the sea,. The exhilaration begins then, with Angus taking a ride on Crusoe's back that is awesome in its joy and beauty. We have seen before movies featuring a friendship between a child and animal, but this one is special in the way it explores relationships among the characters and the growing maturity of the central character. The film's maker's love children and their literature is evident in every scene, the script based on a book by the author of Babe, Dick King-Smith, and directed by the same man who helmed My Dog Skip, Jay Russell. The special effects are totally convincing, but never run away with the film. Adults will enjoy this as much as their young charges, maybe even more because of their greater knowledge of the period of the film's setting, the fearful days of World War two.

For Reflection/Discussion

Contains spoilers.

- 1) How does Angus keep alive his hope that his father will return? At what time did you realize that this was not to be?
- 2) A plot device that the film shares with countless other child-centered films is that of keeping a major development secret from parent(s). What view of adults underlies this? How are we drawn into accepting it? How is this a means for comedy—in this film, and in E.T.?

3) How is the above similar to Jesus' view of children in such passages as Matthew 19:13-15.

4) Compare Crusoe to E.T., or to other movie animals such as Lassie, Willy, or Flicka. Also, compare the scenes in the two films in which the young hero first encounters the alien/animal.

5) If you went only by appearances what role do you think Capt. Hamilton would play in the story? When or how do we learn that he is not the dashing hero he appears to be? How does the film show via Lewis what real heroism is?

6) What is Angus afraid of at the beginning of the story? How is this overcome?

7) How does the bombardment of the loch add a grim note of reality to the fantasy? As this scene might be frightening to young children, I recommend that parents watch the film first before taking anyone younger than six or seven.

8) How might the identity of the old man telling the tourists the story remind you of the conclusion of the children's song "Puff the Magic Dragon" ?

9) What do you think of the way in which the film plays with the legend of the Loch Ness monster? How do we see that the cycle of the creature is about to be repeated?