

'The Nutcracker and the Four Realms' feels flat and lifeless

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: « out of «««««

Running Time: 99 minutes

Most people, myself included, typically think of *The Nutcracker* simply as a famous ballet. However, the stage production is actually based on a 1812 short story by author E.T.A Hoffmann.

The new Disney film *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms* uses the written work as a loose inspiration to tell a new tale. In some ways, one might even think of it as a filmic sequel. It is a colorful picture and one that may appeal to small children, but doesn't translate nearly as well for older members of the audience.

Clara (Mackenzie Foy) is a downcast youngster, upset over the death of her mother enough to take it out on her father (Matthew Macfadyen).

As the holidays approach, the lead is gifted with a locked, ornate egg and a cryptic message from her mother. During a Christmas party, the girl travels through a magical portal to a spectacular world where she hopes to find a key that will open the oval object. Clara succeeds, but not before the little opener is stolen by a mischievous mouse and his cohorts. She then meets leaders from various realms within this world, including Sugar Plum (Kiera Knightley).

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Plum and the others inform Clara they knew her late mom and that Ginger (Helen Mirren) from the Fourth Realm is plotting to use the girl’s key against the entire kingdom.

For a relatively short film (without credits it actually runs under 90 minutes), this is an awkwardly plotted movie that takes some time to really get moving.

There’s a fair amount of set-up involved, between introducing the girl and her relations/family friends, setting up the fantasy world and those within it, including a friendly soldier (Jayden Fowora-Knight) who vows to help, and then introducing the threat.

In fact, it feels as if the film is almost halfway over before the real adventure to retrieve the key begins. Even with all the setup, certain performers like Morgan Freeman and Jack Whitehall seem underused.

The imagery is eye-popping in certain respects when the film retreats into the fantastic kingdom.

There are some interesting visuals with life-sized toys and moving mechanical apparatuses, but the digital animation is more than apparent in the backgrounds and many of the environments presented aren’t convincing. It’s clear that a lot of this movie was shot in front of a green screen.

The characters themselves also are left with little to say... there appears to be a certain flatness to the proceeding in general.

A couple of minor comments earn a chuckle, but much of the dialogue feels stilted and the majority of gags fall flat. Sadly, the shrieking Sugar Plum character comes across as particularly grating.

The editing is strangely clunky as well.

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The action scenes don't offer any thrills or tension, often forcing the young girl and her friends to fight off oncoming forces with lengthy shots involving heavy visual effects. There isn't enough cutting or coverage used to enhance these sequences, particularly later on, and the confrontations do very little to add excitement to the grand finale.

And while the introduction of themes like grief and loss could have added the potential for a deeper and more meaningful story, the film ultimately backs away from addressing them, at least over the course of the quest. The other realm-based characters are clearly upset about the passing of Claire's mom, but this movie avoids dwelling on it, missing a big dramatic opportunity.

I don't want to sound too harsh, and I certainly believe that young children will enjoy the bright and pretty colors on display, but if that's the best that I can say about *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms*, then something has certainly gone amiss. If your kids are excited about seeing the movie, it may be best to simply drop them off at the theater and return for them after the credits start rolling.

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By Glenn Kay

For the Sun