

'Jojo Rabbit' will be hard to forget

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 08 November 2019 09:29



Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 108 minutes

Over the past several years, New Zealand writer/director/performer Taika Waititi has slowly and steadily earned a large fanbase thanks to his exciting work on *What We Do in the Shadows*, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*

and

Thor: Ragnarok

. His latest,

Jojo Rabbit

, is one of his boldest and most eccentric pictures, mixing satire, slapstick and drama in equal measure. Admittedly, the humor is hit and miss and the concoction won't appeal to all. Yet, after a bit of time, this reviewer found himself gradually won over by the story, characters, and a couple of grimly amusing moments. The movie certainly isn't quite like any other war picture out there.

Jojo (Roman Griffin Davis) is an awkward ten-year old German boy in the Hitler Youth who has succumbed to the propaganda around him, idolizing the Nazi party so much that his imaginary friend encouraging him is none other than Adolf Hitler (Taika Waititi). When some kids in the program tease the boy and an accident occurs, he is sent back to his mother (Scarlett Johansson). After discovering a Jewish girl named Elsa (Thomasin McKenzie) hiding in the walls of their home, Jojo comes to the conclusion that turning her over to authorities could result

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in the prosecution of his mother and perhaps even himself. As Jojo struggles with the situation, his interactions with Elsa become less antagonistic.

The child soon realizes that blind patriotism isn't necessarily beneficial, and the information told about the so-called enemy is inaccurate.

This sounds more like a drama than a comedy, but early sections of the feature are played entirely for laughs as we see the world through the child's eyes, conversing with an infantilized version of Hitler created by a prepubescent mind. The Hitler Youth spout ridiculous tales about Jewish people, but don't seem competent enough to pose a threat to anyone but themselves (and the adults leading them aren't much more competent). Witnessing these blunt kids surrounded with disturbing Nazi party imagery does highlight the absurdity of the leaders and their values. At this point, the movie is essentially a running series of verbal and slapstick gags.

A few of them earn laughs, although not all of the early jokes on display land.

Still, the older supporting cast does manage to sell the material. Rebel Wilson gets in a few good lines, blurting out increasingly ridiculous fallacies about the Jewish people. Other standouts include Sam Rockwell as an injured captain demoted to training the kids. He gets mileage out of masking his character's horrible ideologies and boastful tendencies to cover for some grave doubts and concerns about the future.

This results in the occasional moment of humanity between himself and the kids. Stephen Merchant may have both the film's most tense and funny scene as an oddly threatening Gestapo agent who arrives to search Jojo's home.

Of course, Jojo's surreal fantasy world must eventually break down and the character is forced to contend with the reality of the situation and the true nature of war. Later sections, when the movie introduces real danger and gets to the heart of its themes of how a young person desperate to belong can be tempted into an awful movement (while still providing a darkly humorous observation or two along the way), is actually when the film is at its best. Either that, or it just took a little longer for this reviewer to get onto its wavelength. The final act does also manage to pull its many odd elements together effectively.

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Truthfully, this picture isn't going to work for everyone. It's a difficult sell to present a horrific part of history through a kid's eyes with plenty of jokes and some viewers will have difficulty processing the oddball approach to depicting a fascist regime. Yet despite some scattershot humor and a few moments that don't quite land perfectly, this reviewer found himself impressed enough overall to give it a recommendation. *Jojo Rabbit* is a brave and unique attempt to meld dark humor with a terrible chapter in history, and moviegoers who enjoy the filmmaker and those who are patient enough to endure the more awkward elements won't easily forget this picture.

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