

‘Wolfwalkers’ is one of the best animated films of the year

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

Running Time: 103 minutes

This film is available for streaming on AppleTV+ beginning Dec. 11.

For decades now, Pixar and Disney have been winning award after award for their impressively produced animated films. But they aren't the only team of talented filmmakers and artists out there providing family entertainment. The Irish company Cartoon Saloon has also had its fair share of successes, including titles like *The Secret of Kells*, *Song of the Sea* and *The Breadwinner*,

each of which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. Their latest is called

Wolfwalkers, and it's every bit as impressive as their other features.

In fact, it may be their best picture yet.

A clever English girl named Robyn Goodfellowe (Honor Kneafsey) is taken to Ireland by her hunter father Bill (Sean Bean) in order to serve a walled-in city under the control of Oliver

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Cromwell (Simon McBurney). The girl is told to stay out indoors while her dad wipes out a wolf pack causing trouble for locals clearing trees from the surrounding woods. However, Robyn ventures outside the walls and befriends an almost feral youngster, Mebh Óg MacTíre (Eva Whittaker). The protagonist soon learns that the odd girl is a Wolfwalker, essentially a human being who can transform into a wolf.

Robyn soon learns more about the origins of these fantastic creatures as well as their struggle. The lead decides to protect her new friend from the extremely dangerous Cromwell, as well as her own father.

Naturally, there is more going on within the story than just what appears in the synopsis. Yes, this is a modern fairy tale steeped in Irish myth and lore. However, it is also a coming-of-age story that addresses a young woman testing boundaries of the conservative society around her, while she attempts to find her own morals to live by and her place in the world. In fact, the protagonist finds herself being welcomed into the fold as a Wolfwalker and must determine whether or not her newfound magical abilities are something she wants to embrace. While the plot itself doesn't offer a great many story surprises, the voice cast is excellent and sells the youngster's inner struggle about her shifting loyalties and conflicting feelings with remarkable ease.

The various films from this production company have their own distinct look involving hand-drawn characters, backed by vibrant colors and environments. This title is no exception and is filled with stunning imagery from beginning to end. At times, the backdrops almost appear to pop off of the screen. The city depicted early in the film is impressively stylized, but as the story progresses deeper into the forest, the visuals become even more remarkable.

The transformations from human to wolf are clever, at times shifting to a low point of view with the camera moving around. Some shots provide the animals seeing individual scents visibly trailing off those around them. It is unique and fun to watch. Even the city environments set at night are colorful and filled with deep red hues that make an impression.

The story is also tightly constructed and ties everything up quite nicely by the close. And for parents worried about the film's PG rating, there are a few intense bits and some violence at the close, but nothing that should result in any nightmares for children. In the end, this a striking movie with a distinctive style that is different from typical big studio family features. The movie's wonderful visuals, coming-of-age story, and subtle ecological themes also add layers of depth

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that help it stand out.

Simply put, like all the other titles from this production house, *Wolfwalkers* is a winner. In fact, it is seemingly guaranteed to earn itself a Best Animated Feature nomination at this year’s Academy Awards. And for this particular reviewer, it certainly tops anything else out there. Yet regardless of whether it wins an Oscar or is denied a victory at the ceremony, it’s a unique, ageless family feature that will stand the test of time with anyone looking for quality animated entertainment for the entire family.

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