

Review: Spielberg's Heartwarming 'War Horse'

Albert Narracott loved the thoroughbred horse from the moment he saw him. When his father purchased the animal in a moment of pride, Albert vowed to take care of him. He named his beloved horse Joey and instantly set to work on training him.

Set in Europe during World War I, Steven Spielberg's *War Horse* follows Albert and Joey on an incredible journey of courage and adventure. Played by newcomer Jeremy Irvine, Albert teaches Joey how to plow his father's field for planting, despite tremendous opposition from his family and townspeople who do not think the small mare has the stamina.

When Albert's father, Ted Narracott, sells Joey to the British military in a moment of desperation, young Albert is devastated and pleads with the soldier who purchased Joey to let him serve alongside his animal. Capt. Nicholls (Tom Hiddleston, *Thor*) refuses because Albert is too young, but he agrees to return the horse when the war is over.

Albert soon finds out Capt. Nicholls has died in battle, and he fears Joey has met the same fate. But the brave horse makes his way through Europe as we watch him become acquired by German soldiers and then cared for by a young girl and her grandfather in France.

Joey is eventually dragged back into battle and forced to haul heavy artillery for soldiers intent on completing their mission with no thought to the consequences the horses face. Though the thoroughbred escapes, racing through ravaged lands, he entangles himself along the way in barbed wire fences.

As viewers, we're taken through a gripping journey of triumph, sadness, hope and joy. Albert joins the war when he's old enough in an effort to find his dear horse. With Joey's

tenacity and Albert's love, it is hard not to believe these two will be reunited again—as impossible as it may seem.

Because it is set in the middle of WWI, *War Horse* features violence. Several battle scenes depict dead soldiers and horses strewn on the battlefield. Two German traitors are executed and throughout the film, horses are treated brutally. Albert is gassed in a battle scene, and afterward he is badly scarred around the eyes.

Spielberg puts his own touch on the film, based on a young adult novel that was adapted into an award-winning play. Though promoted heavily among the “faith-based community,” *War Horse* doesn't contain overtly Christian messages beyond such elements as loyalty, friendship and laying down your life for another—even if it's a horse.

Characters mention God a handful of times, as when a down-on-his-luck Ted Narracott tells his wife: “I used to believe God gave each man his fair portion of bad luck. Now I don't believe that anymore.” And when Capt. Nicholls and Joey enter their first battle, the soldiers shout, “Fear God! Honor the King!”

Though Spielberg's latest wartime project has a heartwarming message and contains no sexual content or noticeable profanity, the movie earns its PG-13 rating for intense battle sequences. Families with young children may opt to choose another movie on its Christmas Day release. But those with teenagers will enjoy the tale of a young boy and the incredible, unconditional love he has for a horse that is more friend than farm animal.