

Film review – War Horse: Grief & Canthers Of The Best Kind

☒ Director Steven Spielberg.

Producer Steven Spielberg/Kathleen Kennedy

146 mins. War/Drama

In the Spielberg cinematic bestiary of badly behaving animals we have previously encountered boat-eating psychotic sharks, dysfunctional Raptors with a Ph.D in stealth attack and a T Rex with lysine deprived anger-management issues.

Now, at a merciless cinematic gallop, he brings us a feel-good, shaggy-mane epic melodrama that only the most hardened of cynics won't feel a tug on their heart reins. Those who consider denouements predicated on Fate and coincidences generosity a little stretched, look away now.

Based on Michael Morporgo's eponymous short novel and the critically acclaimed equine animatronic stage production, the writers, Lee Hall and Richard Curtis, screenplay adaptation remains essentially faithful to the original text. One fundamental narrative conceit needing to be changed being that horse-hero Joey, in the novel, is the narrator fluent in English, French and German, listening together with a passable grasp of clotted-cream thick Devonian accents. His ability to manage the latter stands him in good stead when he's hacking his way through the mud and blood trench slaughter of the World War 1 battlefields.

It's a simple story, unashamedly sentimental but, as ever within the narrative themes that Morporgo and Spielberg do best, the essence is that of loyalty, honesty, heroism and

hope. The film opens with John Williams' luscious orchestral strings paying homage to his namesake, Ralph Vaughn's Lark Ascending, as we aerial-view the harsh beauty of the Devonshire granite tor landscape where young Albert (Jeremy Irvine) and family struggle against agrarian harshness and dad's drinking. Albert befriends the fiery colt, Joey, and what a team they make. But war-clouds are rolling across the valley, demanding both man and horse enlistments.

The War sees Joey parted from Albert when he is sold (it's that or eviction) to be a champion cavalry horse. The set-piece battle-charge, considered by the dashing fellows as rather unsporting to catch Jerry with his pants down, rapidly descends into carnage as medieval tactics confront 20th century machine-gun cross-fire. The charge through the golden field of flax realised by Janusz Kaminski's cinematography is stunning. Whenever sentimentality might encroach just a little too much, Spielberg's directorial horse-sense brings staggering realism to the fore with the Tommies' horrific 'over the top' attack across barbed-wire Hell.

Perhaps similar to the passed-on boots in All Quiet On The Western Front, Joey passes into different ownerships behind and along the German Front. Though it is lauded as a family film, and rightly so, the 12A rating should come with advisory caveats. At 146 minutes it might be a demand on younger derrières and the battle scenes, though not of the Private Ryan graphic terror, are very powerful indeed. The demises of various dobbins (who shall remain anonymous) are going to demand a family pack of Kleenex. An engrossing and uplifting film. Recommended.

<p>Cineworld – Edinburgh – Fountain Park, 130/3 Dundee Street □11:00□ – □13:10□ – □14:10□ – □16:20□ – □17:20□ – □19:30□ – □20:30□ – □22:40□</p>

[Vue Cinemas – Edinburgh](#) –

Greenside Place, Omni Leisure Building,

□15:30□ – □16:50□ – □17:20□ – □19:30□ – □20:00□ – □20:30□ –
□22:45□ – □23:10□

[Vue Cinemas – Edinburgh Ocean Terminal](#) –

Ocean Drive – Victoria Dock – Leith, Ocean Terminal, Edinburgh

□13:40□ – □15:30□ – □16:50□ – □17:20□ – □19:30□ – □20:00□ –
□20:30□ – □22:40□

[ODEON Edinburgh Lothian Road](#) – 118 Lothian Road, Edinburgh

□14:00□ – □17:15□ – □20:30□

[ODEON Edinburgh Wester Hailes](#) –

Westside Plaza, 120 Wester Hailes Road, Edinburgh

□14:00□ – □17:10□ – □20:10□