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## The Water Horse - Blu-ray

Will this film sink or swim?

by Chris Hall published on 4 July 2008

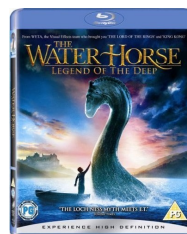
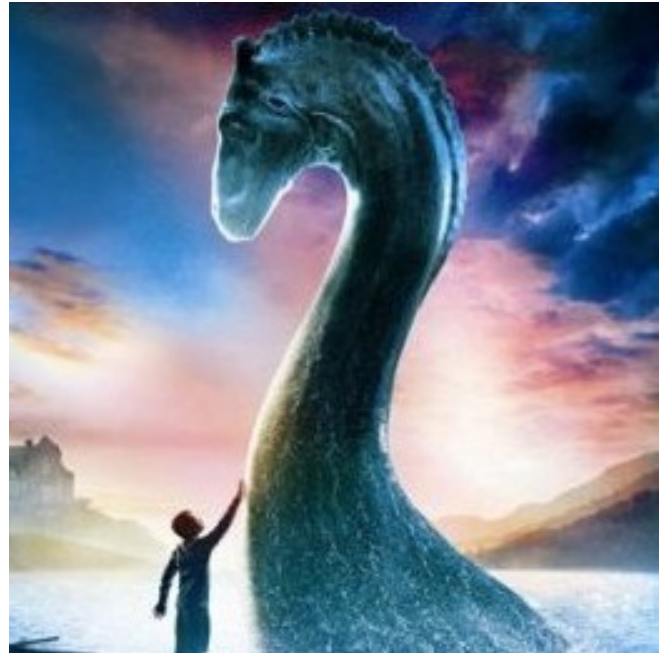
When a young boy, Angus MacMorrow (Alex Etel), finds a mysterious egg on the shore of Loch Ness, it triggers the unravelling of a classic children's adventure story, all set in Scotland during the Second World War, with the aim of building on the legend of the Loch Ness monster. From director Jay Russell, probably best known for *Ladder 49*, *The Water Horse* pulls in a range of home grown, but rather unheard of, talent to fill the few roles of any importance.

When the egg hatches revealing a strange creature, it immediately becomes the focus of Angus's attentions, a boy who seems to be devoid of any other friends, whilst pining for his absent father.

Emily Watson tackles the reserved Mrs MacMorrow, Angus's mother, who despite the somewhat serious approach to her parental responsibilities is drawn into a triangle of potential love interest between the dashing but upper-class twit of Captain Hamilton (David Morrissey) and Naval hero come handyman Lewis Mowbray (Ben Chaplin).

The story, based on the book by Dick King-Smith, follows the typical sentimental relationship of child with animal, from the foundation of friendship to ultimate teary separation, and in those terms doesn't step outside fairly safe grounds. The war setting and presence of a battery from the Royal Artillery provide a large dollop of the plot, with undertones of "war is bad", and when Captain Hamilton sees the affections of Mrs MacMorrow turning towards Mr Mowbray, he resorts to firing off his large gun, literally.

This sets off a chain of events that run down to the conclusion of the film, the revelation of the truth about Angus's father and fate of the "beastie".



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Etel's performance as protagonist is interesting, if a little flat: reflective moments thinking about his father come off with some gravitas, but aside from those it is difficult to believe the emotion. Chaplin plays a good handyman but isn't really stretched in his role and Morrissey makes good work of the pompous Captain, fitting the all the stereotypes you'd expect.

Visually, the backdrop of Loch Ness and the surrounding countryside (which is mostly New Zealand) is something of a treat, especially for those watching in high-definition of the Blu-ray version, the snowy "highland" peaks in contrast to the loch are used to great effect. The creation of the beast is on the whole very good, with a seamless interaction with characters and environment, which only seems to slip once released into the loch - a few fuzzy hands here, the odd splash there, which don't seem to fit.

The story also contains some depth which is not really explored in the film, but is reminiscent of other children's adventures, from *The Railway Children* to *Narnia* and *Harry Potter*. Themes of class and family, man versus nature and child versus adult all run beneath the story to provide some interest for more mature audiences.

At its core, *The Water Horse* is a classic children's story and will entertain child and adult alike with its runaway escapism. The entire story is told as flashback (like *Saving Private Ryan* and *Titanic*), by arguably the film's biggest name, Brian Cox (*Bourne*, *X-Men*), but it feels unnecessary: it brings nothing to the telling of the story, except as a platform for the closing scene.

On the Blu-ray edition you get a host of extras, including a number of interesting featurettes, which talk through some of the other legends of Nessie, as well as interviews with monster hunters and so on, with the normal "making of" elements. A raft of deleted scenes confirm that the film was sensibly edited, save for the removal of some comic retorts of one of the old boys.

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## At a glance

### What is it?

Family adventure

### Good

Touching story free from Hollywood pizzazz, great for kids

### Bad

Narrative approach is a little unnecessary

### Verdict

*The Water Horse* has all the makings of good wholesome family entertainment, without having to resort of over-the-top Hollywood tactics

**Price** 24.99 Blu-ray/&pound;19.99 DVD

**Our score**

**6/10**

**Your score**

**?/10**

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There is also an interactive game where you get to raise your own Water Horse which younger viewers might enjoy.

## **VERDICT**

The Water Horse has all the makings of good wholesome family entertainment, without having to resort to over-the-top Hollywood tactics, with a touching story, never straying too far from the straightforward adventure plot that will appeal to kids as well as their parents.

Rating: PG

Starring: Alex Etel, Emily Watson, Ben Chaplin, David Morrissey, Brian Cox

Directed by: Jay Russell

Extras: Virtual Water Horse game, Deleted Scenes, Featurettes, Trailers