



On an adventure

Looking for conversation starters, *Sophie Lister* finds relevant themes in popular culture...

The Narnia books are infused with the magic of childhood. For those of us who first encountered them at a young age, they conjure memories of bedtime stories – of hoping against hope that we could really walk through a wardrobe into a snowy wood.

Reading the familiar stories through adult eyes may reveal more clearly the biblical allegories beneath the surface. But perhaps our childhood experiences of CS Lewis' fantastical world have something equally potent to teach us. Perhaps the magic – the sense of wonder,

adventure and the unknown – is a precious lesson in itself.

The recent Narnia film adaptations have been somewhat heavier in tone than the books. Clearly influenced by the success of *The Lord of the Rings* movies, the filmmakers have chosen to aim more at teens than children. This December sees the release of the third Narnia film, and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* promises to restore some enchantment to the franchise. Arguably the most beloved (and cinematic) of the series, *Dawn Treader* is less about epic battles and more about a journey of the imagination.

Films



AFRICA UNITED (opens 22 Oct)

Produced by Christians, this lively and colourful adventure movie centres on four children hitchhiking from Rwanda to South Africa to take part in the opening ceremony of the 2010 World Cup. Along the way, the film takes in the relevant big issues, including Aids, war refugees, child soldiers and the sex trade. These are seen in the context of the children's everyday lives, which is startlingly effective. And while the plot's sentimentality feels a little forced, the filmmakers vividly capture the continent's obsession with football as well as the difference caring people can make in a child's life.

RC

ANOTHER YEAR (5 Nov)

Mike Leigh astutely slices through polite society with this North London drama about a couple (Jim Broadbent and Ruth Sheen) trying to quietly live their happy, easy life while around them their friends and family (including the outstanding Lesley Manville and David Bradley) struggle with a variety of heavy issues. The film gently simmers with raw honesty about things both said and unsaid, while the gifted actors mine the material for rich subtext. And even though the film is made up mostly of conversations, the attention to detail is often deeply moving.

RC

MIRAL (3 Dec)

A true story from Israel, this drama covers 50 years with earthy honesty, tracing the legacy of Hind (Hiam Abbass), a Palestinian woman who with partition in 1948 opened her home to young Muslim refugees. One of her children is Miral (*Slumdog Millionaire's* Freida Pinto), a smart young teen whose journey from narrow-minded to sensitively observant is at the heart of the film. Beautifully shot and edited in a jagged, genuine way, the film's abrupt ending undermines the story's emotional power. But it's still an urgent, enlightening approach to a deeply thorny issue.

RC



A new side of Narnia: *Lucy takes in the view (Georgie Henley, left), while King Caspian greets his old pal Edmund (Ben Barnes and Skandar Keynes, right)*

The story finds Edmund (Skandar Keynes) and Lucy (Georgie Henley) returned to Narnia with their sour cousin Eustace (Will Poulter) when they are swept through a magical painting. Fished out of the sea and onto the good ship *Dawn Treader*, they are reunited with their friend Caspian (Ben Barnes), now a king, then set off on the voyage of a lifetime. Caspian and his crew are sailing eastwards on a quest to find the seven lost lords of Narnia, who were exiled during his usurping uncle's rein.

Seeking adventure

Unlike the previous two stories, this instalment does not find the land of Narnia in dire peril; there is no evil witch to defeat and no throne to reclaim. Instead, King Caspian has chosen to seek adventure for adventure's sake. To the literal-minded Eustace, nothing could be more senseless. Raised without storybooks and more concerned with health and safety than with reaching the end of the world, it takes a drastic transformation to turn Eustace into anything resembling a warrior.

It isn't difficult to identify with Eustace, as we're often far too tied up in the prosaic follies and fashions of our culture. He requires a lesson in humility before he can begin to appreciate the wonders of the voyage with the same childlike excitement as his cousins. In other words, in gaining a childlikeness he loses his childishness.

No longer petty and self-centred, he becomes a useful member of the crew, even taking up a sword when the ship is in peril. It's a striking, subtle portrayal of how we move towards maturity through acknowledging our comparative ignorance and discovering our positions as dependent children of God.

Threats and temptations

It is appropriate, in the light of this, that the *Dawn Treader's* most courageous crew member is its smallest. Reepicheep the mouse (voiced by Simon Pegg), diminutive though he might be, lacks nothing when it comes to bravery. His love of adventure and willingness to plunge headlong into danger puts the others to shame. Captivated by the thought of reaching Aslan's country at the end of the world, Reepicheep is unperturbed by the threats and temptations that rear their heads along the way.

His faith in his destination is unshakeable, and his desire to reach it overwhelming. The straightforwardness with which he pursues his goal calls to mind Paul's words: "I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us" (Philippians 3.14).

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader is a reminder that faith itself is an



The awe and excitement of their voyage is only the beginning

adventure. In the final pages of Lewis' novel, Aslan tells a distraught Lucy and Edmund that they will not be returning to Narnia, but they can get to know him by "another name" in their own world. The implication is that the awe and excitement they have experienced on their voyage is only the beginning.

So the magic that we first sensed when reading Lewis' books in childhood points towards something even more wonderful. As Aslan says, "This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there."

► *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* opens in cinemas on 10 December. Further discussions of Christian themes in pop culture can be found at: damaris.org

► Note that the release of *The Adjustment Bureau*, which was discussed in the last issue, has been moved back to next spring.

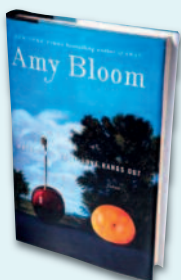


Sophie Lister writes for Culturewatch.org

Books

WHERE THE GOD OF LOVE HANGS OUT by Amy Bloom (Granta)

This collection of interlocking stories by author and psychotherapist Amy Bloom explores the potential for passion and tedium, love and loss, between spouses, families and friends. Bloom does not shy away from erotic and unorthodox expressions of love, nor from the consequences of betrayal and discontent. Her characters are blighted by loveless attachments, physical ailments and shameful regrets. When human love disappoints, they are forced to escape into daydreams 'so beautiful, so drenched in the lush, streaming light of what is not'. This book finds hope in gracious displays of affection bestowed on the ageing, ill and insecure. **HP**



BLOOD & SAND by Frank Gardner (Bantam)

In June 2004, on the last day of a reporting assignment, Islamist gunmen shot the BBC's security correspondent Frank Gardner and cameraman Simon Cumbers. Cumbers died. Gardner lived, but is partly paralysed. This gripping book tells that story, but also casts a very well-informed eye over the state of the Middle East. The region captivated Gardner during his student years, and his depth of knowledge is remarkable. It is a sobering read, because it shows what can be done in the name of extremist religion and the effect that a minority can have on the world. Unputdownable. **HS**

CDs

RECOVERY by Eminem (Polydor)

Reviewers have said that Marshall Mathers' latest album represents a return to the rapper's best form. Not for the faint-hearted, his lyrics are frequently violent and explicit, but also piercingly honest. In *Talkin' 2 Myself*, the star confesses his identity crisis: "Marshall is not an egomaniac ... he's not a desperado, he's desperate." International hit single *Not Afraid* is a candid tribute to fans who have stood by the rapper through dips in his career. This empathy that is the album's greatest strength: "Just lettin' you know that you're not alone ... been down the same road." **HP**

