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## 'Raya and the Last Dragon' is full of adventure

BY MAKENZIE WHITTLE

The Bulletin

Disney hits mostly the right notes with its latest entry into the action princess genre, "Raya and the Last Dragon" all while following its paint-by-numbers approach to storytelling.

Not that there's anything wrong with that if the story is effective, which "Raya" story is.

As with most newer young Disney princess movies, its focus is more on adventure and self-discovery than being wrapped up in finding a prince. In fact there is, refreshingly, no prince to be found.

We get a little prologue explaining the world of Kumandra, an ancient, southeast Asian-inspired land where humans and dragons coexisted until evil spirits called the Druun arrived and turned everyone they

touched to stone.

The dragons decided to put all their power into a gem in order to rid the land of the Druun and in so doing, erased the dragons, too.

With the dragons gone, the people of Kumandra began fighting for power and control over the gem, believing that whoever possessed it would be prosperous.

Kumandra was then divided into five tribes: Fang, Heart, Spine, Talon and Tail.

We meet Raya (voiced by Kelly Marie Tran) when she is a fierce young girl learning to become a protectorate of the dragon's gem by her father, Chief Benja (Daniel Dae Kim) of Heart, who has the idealistic notion that he can unite the tribes again.

When he invites them all to Heart, Raya meets and quickly befriends Namaari



Disney

A scene from "Raya and the Last Dragon," now in theatres and available for premium on-demand streaming on Disney+.

(Gemma Chan), daughter of the chief of Fang. They bond over their love of dragons when Namaari tells Raya about a legend that says one dragon survived and is waiting at the end of the river.

Which river? No one knows.

When Raya shows Namaari the Dragon Gem, Fang guards descend on them and try to steal it away. Soon, the rest of the tribes show up demanding possession of the gem, until it falls and shatters into five pieces.

This allows the Druun back into the world and they begin turning people to stone once again, including Chief Benja.

Six years later Raya is on a quest to find the last dragon at the end of the last river she has explored. It's here that she awakens Sisu (Awkwafina), a goofy young water dragon who quickly trusts Raya and agrees to join her in finding the remaining pieces of the gem in order to set things right.

Through their journey they, of course, meet up with some cutesy (who could very easily become annoying) characters that will make kids laugh with their antics, there are also a couple of characters for the parents to laugh at too.

While the basic plot is right out of Joseph Campbell, the themes of trust, forgiveness and helping others all rope the story into something more emotionally driven than one would expect. And with the world the way it

### More Information

"Raya and the Last Dragon"

107 minutes

Rated PG for some violence, action and thematic elements.



is right now, those themes ring even louder.

The story from Adele Lim and Qui Nguyen is tight and never wanders. I even found myself wanting the 107 minute run time extended to see more of the gorgeous world the animation team created.

One incredible example of their animation can be seen with Sisu's facial expressions, perfectly mirroring Awkwafina's expert voice acting at every turn so much it makes one wonder if they used motion capture.

While the basic plot isn't really anything we haven't seen before with a Disney movie, it still hits all of the right beats and measures to deliver an emotionally impactful story that is full of adventure and heart.

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