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Not safe, but funny

The VOC Silent Film Harmonic will provide live musical accompaniment to a screening of Harold Lloyd's classic Safety Last tonight (Thursday) at The Registry Theatre in Kitchener. The 1923 film is renowned for the stunt of Harold Lloyd scaling the outside of an office building.

www.registrytheatre.com

Going Coastal with Neil

Coastal, documenting Neil Young's most recent solo tour, is a behind-the-scenes look at the legendary musician. The documentary offers a glimpse behind the curtain, from his everyday observations on the bus to his candid, wry banter with his audience. It's at the Princess Cinemas Apr. 17 and 20.

www.princesscinemas.com

Getting their medieval on ... in Conestogo

Matthew Ninaber directs, writes, produces and stars in A Knight's War, an epic movie adventure made on a budget deemed impossible

Andrea Eymann
Observer Staff

A CONESTOGO RESIDENT BROUGHT MEDIEVAL fantasy to life, building a castle in his backyard for his latest film.

A Knight's War, co-written and co-starring Matthew Ninaber and his brother Jeremy, is the story of two chevaliers who venture through a deadly realm to save the soul of the Chosen One, Avalon (played by Kristen Kaster), a woman slated to be sacrificed in a demonic ritual. Believing her to be key to a prophecy, they need to find her before the Nephilim dark gods do, staving off chaos and doom for humanity.

Along the way, the two knights, Bhodie (Jeremy Ninaber) and William (Matthew Ninaber), fight witches, demons and other brutal foes.

"I think the cool thing about A Knight's War... this movie focuses on the heroes and how every hero needs a sidekick," said Ninaber, noting that it is the same in real life where you need that person who is going to stand by your side.

Avalon goes through a great deal of trauma, causing her to be angry towards society, but Bhodie is there making sure she is not alone in the struggle.

"I wanted to write a movie with that dynamic, showing just endless loyalty and what that looks like on screen," Ninaber explained.

He started developing the script in 2022, and filming began the following year.

Ninaber's father was a pastor, but he was always drawn to the dark sides of the Bible. Much of his inspiration for this motion picture came from the Book of Enoch, which is an ancient apocalyptic religious text that contains the origins of demons and Nephilim – mysterious beings imagined as being of great size and strength.

The 38-year-old director and writer has been making movies since high school, and "it's just been a thing that I've always wanted to do, so I worked up the courage to go make one and get a little bit better," he said, noting this is his fifth film.

He also created Last Run (2012), Extraction Day (2014), Transference (2020) and Death Valley (2021).

"It's really exciting," said Ninaber about how far he has come. Now, he has people from Los Angeles and the United Kingdom calling about making films.

It was with Transference that he first got a call from someone who wanted to buy his film.

"It's a very surreal thing, and that's the first time that someone put down on a piece of paper; they wanted to give us money for a movie," he said.

For now, they are trying to keep the work in Conestogo. "I do think there's a really great group of people here, and I like being part of my community."

Yet, there was a moment when the cast and crew took a trip to Alberta to shoot in the middle of a frozen lake in minus-35 degree weather.

Jacqueline Nineber, his wife, noted it was so cold that Ninaber's beard was full of ice, and Kaster's eyelashes had frozen water droplets on them.

Jacqueline helped make this production come to life behind the scenes as an executive producer and production manager.

Most of this newest movie was shot in his backyard and in the forest down the street, where his neighbours constantly saw actors walking back and forth dressed as monsters or witches, with some of them covered in blood.



Matthew Ninaber's latest film, A Knight's War, was brought to life in his Conestogo backyard. Andrea Eymann



A poster for the A Knight's War, which had it's debut last Friday in Toronto. Submitted

Some even rode skateboards in a monster suit, and "it's a very surreal, very out of the ordinary, but that's what makes it fun," he added.

"And if you go to places where movies are being made already, some of the magic's lost, whereas when you're making movies in places with movies aren't, people are kind of excited by it."

Ninaber's favourite part about this motion picture is watching it in the theatre, "seeing that this was made here with a group of people," he said, noting some said they have no business making this film, as when he shared the script to people in LA who said it was impossible.

"There's no way that you can do this, just for the budget and the scale," he said of the feedback he received.

Still, the film was made for less than $1 million.

"Little by little, we proved so many people wrong. ... People don't make fantasy films anymore because they're very difficult; there's a lot that goes into it," said Ninaber, pointing to the likes of a sword professional and real armour featured in the movie.

They got through the challenges of fantasy at a lower budget by embracing their constraints.

At the script level, they stripped it down to do a story where they would go big where they could, but stayed away from CGI (computer-generated images), as they have seen it happen that the film falls apart quickly and doesn't age well.

When they needed a castle, they built an eight-foot-tall version.

They leaned into the things that they had control over. Initially, they wanted horses but decided to save them for a sequel.

"This world was written so big that this is the first entry point. Hopefully, [we can] make it bigger and explore things that we weren't able to do this time," he said of a possible sequel, which will depend on how this movie does.

He noted the reviews they have received have been fantastic. Phil Hoad's review from The Guardian said: "It nevertheless has a grim self-conviction that grips despite its low-budget limitations."

What Ninaber likes most about films is how they inspire the viewers to live lives bigger than themselves.

"If we don't have good stories in our life, we can be left to our own demise, and a good story helps bring people to a better version of themselves or challenge themselves."

Information about where to find the film can be found online at www.epic-pictures.com/film/a-knights-war.