

# 'Willow': a rose or a weed for moviegoers?

Willow  
Plaza



This is the kind of tale your parents regaled you with at bedtime. A small but sturdy creature named Willow happens upon a baby. The child is destined to be the downfall of the Wicked Queen and Willow's task is to set off on a journey to spirit the baby to the safe haven of Tir Asleen.

Willow is joined on his quest by a rascally thief named Madmartigan and a pair of quarrelling brownies, which are pixie-like characters of questionable help. Together they elude the queen's soldiers, face mysterious dangers and head for a climactic showdown.

But bedtime stories are told every night, and if each tale isn't as fresh and exciting as *The Hobbit* or *Peter Pan*, that's OK. Unfortunately, movies like *Willow* are only made once every two or three years, and when you have to wait that long for a story, it better be good.

*Willow* isn't strong enough to stand up to the scrutiny that it entails, but it is far from the all-out disaster that the advance buzz had given it. Even when you're



not laughing with it, *Willow* is silly and corny enough to let you.

Val Kilmer, who has never impressed me before, gives a hilarious performance as Madmartigan, under the most difficult acting conditions he's faced

yet. His high spirits and razor-sharp comic timing carry the picture, even at its goofiest.

When the queen's tomboyish daughter immediately melts in Madmartigan's arms, we might have groaned, but Kilmer pulls it

off with aplomb. That's a good thing, because director Ron Howard has added little personality to this tale whose main attribute — seamless, stunning special effects — has little to do with him. Furthermore, we have to endure the

Warrior Madmartigan (Val Kilmer) holds Sorsha (Joanne Whalley) after finding out that he won't get a 'Willow' lunchbox for his birthday.

brownies, an annoying, tiresome take offon the insulting Frenchmen from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

There's also a Really Bad Guy named Kael who has to ride around on a horse and wear a mask that makes him look like Skeletor. The only bad thing we ever see Kael do is let the Wicked Queen slap him around a lot, which is hardly the kind of action that strikes fear into the hearts of men.

On the other hand, while it may not do a lot for Kael's self-image, it is sort of fun to watch the Wicked Queen shove him around and scream, "FIND ME THE CHILD!!!" — another way of saying that *Willow* may not bring out the kid in you, but it will make you bring out the kids.

By Michael Giltz