

Forbard Story Services Script Report

Title:	THE KING
Author:	David Michod and Joel Edgerton
Type/pp:	SP/113
Genre:	Historical Drama
Locale:	England
Circa:	Early 15 th Century
Budget:	Med.

Logline:

After his father's death, a reluctant Henry V takes the throne. The young king must navigate deceit, war, and politics in his quest to unite England.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Premise		X		
Storyline		X		
Characterizations				X
Dialogue			X	
Plot/Structure			X	
Production Values		X		
RECOMMENDATION:	Project: PASS			
	Writer: PASS			

Summary:

PRINCE HENRY 'HAL' of Wales is the wayward son of KING HENRY IV. Uninterested in succeeding his father, Hal spends his days drinking and screwing with his companion, SIR JOHN FALSTAFF. His ailing father informs him that his younger brother, THOMAS, will inherit the throne upon his death. Young Thomas is sent to subdue HOTSPUR's rebellion but is upstaged by the arrival of Hal, who challenges the other man to single combat. Although Hal kills Hotspur, Thomas complains that Hal stole his glory. Shortly thereafter, Thomas is killed in battle after taking his campaign elsewhere. Their father begs Hal to take the throne as his life fades. Hal is crowned King Henry V.

At his coronation feast, the DAUPHIN of France sends Hal a ball as an insulting gift. Hal brushes it off, choosing to focus on peace. He interrogates a French assassin, GILRICH, who claims the King of France sent him to assassinate Hal. CAMBRIDGE and GREY, two nobles, are met by a FRENCH ENVOY in the hopes of weakening their belief in Hal. The men speak to Hal's chief justice, WILLIAM GASCOIGNE, about their concerns. William tells Hal immediately of Cambridge and Grey's secrecy. Hal declares war with France, sentencing both men to death. He asks Falstaff to be his chief military strategist for the upcoming war stating Falstaff is the only man he truly trusts. Hal and his army sail to France. After completing the Siege of Harfleur, they are taunted by the Dauphin. Outnumbered, Falstaff proposes a false advance. With the coming rain, the Frenchmen will be slowed by their horses and heavy armor, while the English will have speed and mobility without it. Falstaff insists on leading the charge. Hearing this, Hal takes off and challenges the Dauphin to single combat, but the Dauphin refuses. The French cavalry descends, but the more agile English army overpowers and immobilizes them. The Dauphin and Hal face-off, and the Dauphin is killed. Hal searches the battlefield for Falstaff but finds him dead. He executes all prisoners, an order that Falstaff previously refused to carry out.

Hal reaches the King of France, KING CHARLES VI, who offers Hal his surrender and hopes that, in a gesture of goodwill, Hal will marry his daughter, PRINCESS CATHERINE. When they return to England, Princess Catherine challenges Hal's reasons for invading France, asking him to think about the people around him who might benefit from such a war. Now suspicious, Hal goes to William and confronts him on the land he would have gained from the annexation of France. William confesses and Hal kills him. Hal returns to his new wife and asks that she always remain honest and true. As they step out onto the balcony, a giant crowd roars, accepting Hal as their new king.

Comments:

The historical drama, **The King** by David Michod and Joel Edgerton (based on the *Henriad* plays by William Shakespeare) was a grim read. The coming-of-age biography of King Henry V, while ambitious, was quite dull. Each character was miserable from beginning to end. Similar in tone to the likes of *Game of Thrones* and *Dunkirk*, the story never achieves the level of rich characterization and entertainment that the others bring with them. There were no standout characters to root for, no unforgettable final battle between Hal and the Dauphin that captured the audience. The Dauphin repeatedly slips in the mud and is seized by Hal's men, breaking the overly serious tone, and letting down the audience.

The writers spent too much time on side characters and not enough on building a solid characterization for Hal. By the time he has taken the throne, the audience does not know Hal well enough to care. There is no emotional hook. Hal has no sincere inner conflict that explains his choices or why the viewer should root for him. In the script, Hal's leadership is undermined by the inclusion of Falstaff. Falstaff overshadows Hal with his military genius. He discusses plans and strategies while Hal waits in the background for someone to tell him what to do. It is unsurprising that there was someone else pulling the strings. The script ignores the great King Henry V to prop up the military prowess of a side character. Hal is a witness to his own story while the emotional texture rests on the shoulders of Falstaff.

A bright spot was the Dauphin. While Hal is brooding for the entire story, the Dauphin brings some humor with his scathing remarks and vicious taunts. Clearly the comic relief, the character's introduction is such a tonal shift from the former bleak misery that it is a welcome change, albeit a confusing one. His character, a villainous caricature, is out of place in this heavy war drama.

There is a sense of duty and resilience that permeates throughout **The King**. Hal is intuitive and cunning for a young man thrust into a seat of power. However, it is something audiences have seen dozens of times. The script did not offer anything different, anything unique, to this repetitive tale. Absolute power corrupts and in Hal's case, it happens overnight. It seems only minutes after taking the throne, he is chopping heads off and heading straight to war. When he leads his army into France, he's lost sight of what he is fighting for, and so has the audience. Like much of the story, the Hal's journey and the ending were predictable. Too often, William was told how trustworthy he was for us to believe his character was anything more than a greedy, manipulative man on a quest for more power and money.

The script highlighted the theme of war and its senselessness, but it is nothing that audiences have not heard millions of times. Hal hoped to prevent war at all costs, even before he was on the throne. He approached the enemy twice to save his people from a needless battle. No matter how much he strived for peace, war seemed inevitable. **The King** demonstrates war as ugly and monstrous throughout, never approaching with too much light. The script highlights how easily wars can start, no matter how foolish they may be.

David Michod and Joel Edgerton's adaptation of Shakespeare's work and real-world events is a letdown. Despite its length, the writers fail to make an impact with their mundane, cliché characters. **The King** is sitting at the cusp of greatness but falls short. Sidelineing the main character, the overwhelming broodiness, and the predictable ending are just a few reasons to pass on **The King** for feature film production.

PASS