



MAAGINEN KRISTALLI (SANTA'S MAGIC CRYSTAL) is a Christmas DVD donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

Belgium / Finland / Italy / Luxembourg 2002-2011 color feature fantasy animation 76 minutes CG Lux (Luxembourg) / EPIDEMZOT (Finland) / Skyline Animation (Belgium) / Aranéo (Belgium) / Studio L'Equipe (Belgium) / Cartoon One (Italy) / Casa Kafka / UFilm / Phase 4 Films / Benuts / The Flanders Audiovisual Fund / The Finnish Film Foundation / The Nordic Film & TV Fund / Dreamwall / City of Rovaniemi / Ministry of Education / Media / Anima Vitae Producers: Jan Theys, Eric Wirix, Léon Pérahia, Raphaele Ingberg, Jan Goossen, Isabelle Molhant, Jeremy Burdek, Martin Metz, Nadia Khamlichi, Adrian Politowski, Mikael Wahlforss, Gilles Waterkeyn

13 of a possible 20 points

*****1/2 of a possible *******

Key: *indicates outstanding vocal performance or technical achievement

(j) designates juvenile performer

Points:

- 0 Directors: Antti Haikala and Mark Mertens**
- 0 Editor: Antti Haikala**
- 1 Animation Camera**
- 1 Lighting: Coppin Geoffrey, Youen Leclerc**

- 0** Screenplay: Thomas Wipf, Bob Swain, Dan Wicksman, Nuria Wicksman, Alessandro Liggieri, Kurt Weldon, Antti Haikala, Ari Martikainen based on a concept by Mikael Wahlforss
- 2** Music: Menno Van Riet* Orchestrator: Menno Van Riet*
Music Recording; Christophe Gérard, Christine Verschorren
- 2** Art Director: Antti Haikala
- 2** Animation: Teemu Auersalo (Key), Luca Bruno (Animation Director), Baliko Christophe, Olivier Druart, Peke Huuhtanen (Key), Max Karesvuori, Tim Klos, Thomas Lepaska, Lauri Manninen, Aki Martikainen (Key), Johannes Parkkonen, Sari Pekkanen, Kaisa Pirttinen, Antti Ripatti (Key), Meruan Salim (Key), Melanie Sorée, Nicolas Vercruyssen, Jere Virta, Kalle Väisänen
- 1** Sound Supervisors: Lydia Desloover, Ivy Vermeyleen
Sound Designers: Quentin Collette, Yves de Mey, Joonas Jyrälä, Einari Koski, Patrick Hubart, Yves Renard, Mila Nevalainen
Supervising Sound Editor: Simon Gershon
Sound Effects: Elias Vervecken, François Fipiat, Stephane Werner, Patrick Hubart, Murielle Bardiau, Marie-Jeanne Wyckmans
- 2** Voice Acting
- 2** Creativity
- 13 total points**

Voices Cast, Original Finnish-Language Version: Jukka Nyland (Yotan, an orphan boy), Paula Vesala (Jaga, girl warrior), Kiti Kokkonen (Jiffy, a squirrel), Veeti Kallio (Basil, Santa's younger twin brother), Henni-Liisa Stam (Didi), Aapo Haikala (Alpo), Jon Jon Geitel (Smoo), Veikko Homkanen (Santa), Antti Jaakola (Latty), others

Voices Cast, English-Language Dubbed Version: Kyle Christensen (Yotan), Clarissa Humm (Jaga), Lisa Kent (Jiffy), Gerald Owens (Basil), David Dreisin (Grouch), C. J. Fam (Didi), Michael Mena (Smoo), Matthew Wetcher (Alpo), Joe Carey (Santa), others

Very much a European cooperative film production involving four distinct nations, **SANTA'S MAGIC CRYSTAL** provides an energetic, colorful, and entertaining view of what might be termed Trouble in Christmasland. The point of view character for this fantasy adventure is an orphan boy named Yotan, who is kidnapped by Basil and two assistants just before Christmas. Yotan had lingered returning from an errand in order to help a younger boy mail a letter to Santa. Unsurprisingly, he garners only rebuff and calumny from his institution's supervisor on his arrival back at the orphanage. So the boy is clearly aligned with virtue and charity, setting him apart in character from both ambitious, scheming Basil and his own legal guardian.

Yotan is amazed to find himself the object of stranger attention later that night. A bumbling bearded adult male is intent on transporting him to the North Pole region. Basil, who turns out to be a slightly younger brother of Santa's, has initiated a plot to overthrow his elder and assume command of Christmas transport operations. To succeed, he must obtain a magic crystal, one which will enable its owner to clone himself exponentially. Employing it will permit the disciplinarian usurper to realize a dream of relocating all the world's children to Santa's workshop. There they can drudge away a joyless childhood making toys for which there would no longer be a market. Astute adults will recognize the motto of Nazi camps underlying this dystopian scheme.

As portrayed here, Santa is a permissive, cheerful, overstuffed monitor of elves. His primary function is to deliver toys. A secondary role is making everyone else happy. Most underlings are content, energetic, and cooperative. Those who aren't have either already been enlisted in Basil's conspiracy or are dashing around frenetically, inclined to mischief or accidental destructiveness.

Piloting a helicopter requisitioned by the film's villain for kidnapping purposes is a reindeer character with an accent. Like all too many characters in this film, his words are compromised by poorly enunciated English dubbing.

Unintentionally, kidnappers also take along Jiffy, a comic relief pragmatic squirrel who alternately obstructs and rescues potential child hero Yotan. Jiffy is saddled with also serving as mouthpiece for every reasonable objection to fantastic adventures contemplated by companions.

Subscribing whole-heartedly to the notion kids demand non-stop action and are completely oblivious to cause-effect relationships, MAAGINEN KRISTALLI employs a slapdash, constantly shifting array of scenes. Adversaries zip through the sky and over polar icecap with speed more appropriate to a science-fiction rocket. While this occasionally yields an exceptionally dazzling moment, a furious cutting pace stitching together blatantly inharmonious settings offers viewers no time to absorb and enjoy it.

Of subordinate characters, most fully realized is Jaga. A kind of Security Force Chief for Santa's defensive army, she's compelled to serve as both rival and love interest for Yotan. Altogether too politically correct a specimen, this probably adolescent girl combines traits of Amazon Queen feminist champion with those of overconfident damsel-in-distress requiring rescue by doubt-ridden male. A plethora of conventional characterizations is not adequately offset by a certain novelty of plot, namely Santa's power to clone himself by means of a coveted crystal.

Suspense is often overwhelming, with one potential disaster barely averted before another looms as replacement. Since surmounting this succession of perils demands constant attention and action by Yotan and helpers, no time is devoted to characterization through backstory or observation. Scenery takes priority over relationships, resulting in unconvincing shifts in loyalties.

Yet there are strong positive elements present. Camera mobility, though extreme, is continuous. This is preferable to a traditional stationary set-up utilizing movement of models and props manually between shots. Color grading, here sacrificed to sheer brilliancy, is no damaging loss. Glitter is an appealing asset in films made for children. Even though inconsistent luminosity obscures tracking details, such shimmerings certainly enhance a fantasy atmosphere for child viewers.

Adults are likely to find more annoying sleighs seemingly unhampered by runner restrictions. These operate visually on hydrofoil principles rather than linear propulsions, rendering them free of normal gravitational pulls. In a film largely devoid of scientific accuracy, such irregularities may seem not only natural, but even desirable.

Menno Van Riet's music is engagingly atmospheric, proper always in tone to the action it accompanies. Whether building and maintaining suspense or hitting the brakes for romantic interludes, the score never grates. Nor does it meander pointlessly.

Not as finely calibrated as numerous animations from the United States and Japan, this European import does suffer in comparison. Too many flash edits are simply camouflages for underdeveloped articulation of character movements.

A screenplay which neglects contrasting aspects within each personality reduces individuals to manipulated puppets with generalized, predictable responses. Only one surprise presents itself: the revelation Santa's brother is a taskmaster spoilsport. Who would have guessed it? Even worse, this antagonist's opinion that children need responsibility as much as entertainment is certainly valid. While Basil's devious, dictatorial approach to child upbringing is reprehensible, arguments presented in justification merit serious consideration. Too much charity can lead to selfishness, in turn generating conflict when wants are thwarted. Santa's open-handedness and inability to perceive its consequences ought to be examined more closely by both adults and youths.

Sound recording is highly refined, but its effectiveness is diluted by inflatedly loud sound effects improperly mixed with dialogue. Resulting sporadic loss of words or syllables is a problem modern technology should be eradicating rather than compounding.

As role model, Yotan is acceptably comforting and relevant to the target audience. He can certainly not be charged with undermining good behavior or exhibiting blatant disregard for custom and authority.

Appropriate holiday viewing for children ages five to nine, SANTA'S MAGIC CRYSTAL is a simplistic and illogical whimsy adults should probably avoid.

Only a single bonus accompanies the feature on this Kaboom! dvd release: a two-minute trailer.