



# LEGEND OF THE SKY KINGDOM

Zimbabwe | 2004 | 73m | U

**Director:** Roger Hawkins

**Producer:** Jacqui Cunningham

**Screenplay:** Phil Cunningham

**Cinematography:** Roger Hawkins

**Original Music:** Andrew Baird

**Leading Players:** Jason Linforth, Miriam Hamblin, Gabriel Phillips

**filmnote**

*The Legend of the Sky Kingdom* was showcased in 2004 at the Waterloo Festival for Animated Cinema (WFAC) in Ontario, Canada to high acclaim. The film is Africa's first animated feature film with remarkable technical achievements; the scenery and characters in the film being created almost entirely from junk (director Roger Hawkins called his methodology "junkmation"). Hawkins incorporates wonderful creations such as: waves of plastic bags, trees with melted straw branches and even dogs with crocodile jaws, helping to bring our imaginations to life. Hawkins has converted and transformed this junk into a fantastical world of warming robot characters, ingeniously intricate creatures and exquisite locations, creating an adventure relatable to both children and adults.

*The Legend of the Sky Kingdom* tells the uplifting tale of three orphaned children who embark on a dangerous escape from their home in the underground city where they are slaves; searching for the fabled kingdom. This land of freedom is home to the great Prince Ariel who rules with courage and kindness. The orphaned children have heard whispers that the mystery of the prince and the legendary Sky Kingdom begins with the two clues "the road is a person" and "believing is seeing". This epic journey has dangers at every turn; deserts, earthquakes, storms and fires. The orphaned slaves meet wonderful creatures some are friends and some are foes. As this inspiring journey unfolds, so do the characters' personalities, and the audience is invited along on this voyage.

A key theme of the film is faith and one that reverberates throughout the expedition. This theme links into the overall allegory of religion that is ever present. Arguably the underground city represents the material world, the sky kingdom is Heaven, the Prince Ariel is Jesus, and the list is endless. Perhaps this allegory creates not an entirely universal message and the persistent quote and theme used throughout the feature of "believing is seeing" ties

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in nicely with the religious symbolism.

This imaginative tale is the first produced screenplay by Phil Cunningham, and is based on his book *The Legend of the Sky Kingdom*, inspired by the street art of Africa and specifically by AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe. His attempt was to inspire them in turn: that they are not on their own, that there are others and that there is hope.

Zimbabwean Cunningham grew up surrounded by nature and developed a passion to tell stories that captured the imagination and moved the heart. Inspired by the orphans that surrounded him, Cunningham saw an opportunity to tell a story of hope and triumph despite very real suffering and so based *The Legend of the Sky Kingdom* on three orphan characters. Cunningham captivates the audience in this tale, touching us with real uncertainty, doubt and happiness, teaching us that "believing is seeing" and "nothing is impossible". Cunningham went on to open his own company Sunrise Productions (based in South Africa). The film has welcomed acclaim; including a Don Quixote Award at the Lucas International Festival of Films for Children and Young People (2004).

**BFF filmnote by Alice Garside**

**This weekend at Bath Film Festival 2009**

Saturday 14 November, Little Theatre, 6.00pm | £7 / £5

**Big River Man**

John Maringouin | USA, UK | 2009 | 101m | 15 | bigriverman.com

This bizarre and captivating documentary begins as a humorous road (river?) movie but shifts to something much darker as barrel shaped Slovenian Martin Strel, having swum the Yangtze, Danube and Mississippi, makes an insane attempt to swim the longest and most perilous river in the world, the Amazon.

Sunday 15 November, Little Theatre, 1.15pm | £5 / £4

**Encounters 2009 International Highlights**

various directors | Denmark, Australia, UK | 2008 / 09 | 78m | 15 | sub-titles | encounters-festival.org.uk

A sneak preview of some international highlights from this year's Encounters Short Film Festival, which is celebrating 15 years as the UK's leading short film festival. Includes the BAFTA-winning *A Matter of Loaf and Death* starring Wallace and Gromit, and other amazing new films from Denmark and Australia.

Sunday 15 November, Rondo Theatre, 4.00pm / 5.50pm | £6 / £4

**Bath Debut kicks off at the Rondo Theatre, Larkhall**

Our run of eight films you shouldn't have missed earlier this year kicks off with Kelly Reichardt's touching US road movie *Wendy and Lucy* followed by Andrezej Jakimowski's delightful Polish comedy *Tricks*.



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