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Bröderna Lejonhjärta

("The Brothers Lionheart")

Sweden TV serial † : 1977 : dir. Olle Hellbom :

: 5 x 25 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

[Lars Söderdahl](#); [Staffan Götestam](#)

Allan Edwall; Gunn Wållgren; Folke Hjort; Per Oscarsson; Tommy Johnsson; Jan Nygren;
Georg Årlin

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[† also released as a film, shortened from 125 to 108 mins]



"Crumb" rides to the rescue

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"A pair of brothers land in the mythical middle ages, where the idyllic life in Cherry Blossom Valley is threatened by the knights of a cruel

despot and a dragoness. The boys become involved in the struggle of good against evil, and so the little Lion brothers become the brothers Lionheart. This unusual children's film – from the book by Astrid Lindgren – is

full of spectacular scenes and magic, without becoming saccharine or falsely sentimental. The accomplished and artistic approach shows that the children's film genre does not have to be a side show. Simultaneously with the feature version a TV series of 125 minutes was made. *** ”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“This slow-moving children's fantasy filmed in Sweden, Denmark and Finland features two brothers who are reunited after death in a mediaeval world where they fight dragons and villains in an attempt to free their war leader, Ulva, who will rid the country of tyrants. If you don't fall asleep within the first forty-five minutes you will be rewarded with a fine fairy tale. **½ ”

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Söderdahl:

“Olle Hellbom, the regular director of Astrid Lindgren stories, had an untypical one in **“THE BROTHERS LIONHEART”**, a straight-faced adventure set in the middle ages (though in fact it is the dream of a dying present-day child).

Jonathan, the teenage brother of little “Crispy” – as the English version has it – gets involved in the rescue of a resistance fighter imprisoned by a cruel tyrant. He refuses to let “Crispy” accompany him into the perils of Wild Rose Valley, but after Jonathan is captured “Crispy” goes on his own rescue mission.

The story, standard saga stuff with none of Lindgren's usual whimsicality, is not a major bundle of fun, but Lars Söderdahl's “Crispy” is completely captivating: scared but brave, serious and determined. He looks wonderful, but the poignant little voice supplied by Nicholas Barnes on the British dubbing makes a vital contribution to the film's undoubted magic.”

[no listing in “The Golden Age of Children's Television”, “Halliwell's Television Companion”, “History of Television”, “Into the Box of Delights - a History of Children's Television”, “Television's Greatest Hits” or “25 Years of ITV - 1955-1980”]

Olle Hellbom also directed several Pippi Longstocking titles (or Pippi Langstrump in Swedish), and many others from Astrid Lindgren's prodigious oeuvre, such as **“RONJA ROVARDOTTAR”** (“Ronja the Robber's Daughter”). Lindgren's daughter was the prime audience for her stories, so not surprisingly her heroes are generally small girls, but girls with a very strong sense of independence and self-will, two-fisted girls who get stuck into life with a vengeance. And Lindgren, no reactionary feminist, also wrote many stories featuring boy leads (**“MEISTERDETEKTIV KALLE BLOMQUIST”**, **“KALLE BLOMQUIST LEBT GEFAHRLICH”**) without using them to convey a social political agenda. **“BRÖDERNA LEJONHJÄRTA”** is a particularly fine example, being less of a high-spirited romp and more centrally concerned with warm fraternal devotion.

The story begins in black and white, two affectionate brothers living with their mother in a grimy industrial town. The elder brother (±16) goes to work, while his younger brother, whom he affectionately calls “Crumb”, is a bedridden and sickly child (±9) with a great fear of death. To comfort him, the older brother concocts a tale about moving on to another world at death, where he will be a fit and strong boy again. They agree that the first one to die will return to the other as a dove to signal all is well. Shortly after, a fire breaks out in their tenement block, and it is the elder brother, in the act of rescuing the younger, who perishes. “Crumb” is inconsolable with grief, but then one night there comes a scratching at his window pane and he finds a beautiful white dove there. Content, he goes to sleep and dies quietly in the dark.

The film now erupts into bright colour, and "Crumb", astonished to find himself whole and fit in a sunlit pastoral landscape, runs to where his older brother is waiting for him beside a stream. They swim and fish together, and "Crumb" is told all about this mediaeval new world and its ways. As the above reviews say, the boys become embroiled in a lost cause to save the idyllic peasant world they've entered, "Cherry Valley", from a cruel feudal overlord in the adjacent land, "Bramble Valley", whose power derives from the terror of a female dragon. Needless to say, it is brave "Crumb" who saves the hour, together with his brother. They vanquish the dragon, but both are killed in the process.

In the final scene they pass on to yet another new life in still different surroundings, while a memorial stone marks the spot where they fell valiantly defeating the dragon.

Clearly, Lindgren was preoccupied in helping children come to terms with death and their own mortality, and while the same story, in the hands of a Disney or Spielberg, would have been mawkish beyond enduring, Hellbom manages to lend it an offhand Swedish air which is quite disarming. The stunts and effects are in truth pretty tacky, betraying a miniscule budget, and all the sword-and-sorcery elements of the story are strictly by-the-numbers stuff, but the intense, expressive devotion between the two brothers makes this an altogether charming tale, the antithesis of modern macho, and it all seems a thousand healthy years from where we are today. I saw it in original Swedish with Dutch subtitling, and as always this is far, far preferable to any hamfisted English-dubbed version. There are nuances of expression in the native language which are invariably lost in the dubbing process. Translating "Crumb" as "Crisp" is just one example of the slapdash approach of dubbing companies.
Recommended.

See subject index under **DEATH / DYING CHILDREN, DINOSAURS & DRAGONS, DIRECTORS, FANTASY / FOLK TALES / FAIRY TALES, ASTRID LINDGREN ADAPTATIONS, RECOMMENDED TITLES, SCANDINAVIA** and **SERIALISATIONS**.