

Escape to Witch Mountain

by Emily Soares | October 07, 2008



Escape to Witch Mountain became one of Disney's most popular live-action films ever when it was released in 1975. Based on the much-loved story by Alexander Key, the film continues to act as a rich introduction to science fiction for kids and nostalgic entertainment for adults. Starring Kim Richards and Ike Eisenmann as Tia and Tony Malone, the film follows the flight of two orphaned children with extraterrestrial powers from the powerful millionaire Aristotle Bolt (Ray Milland) and his lackey Lucas Deranian (Donald Pleasence) — men who want to use the children's powers to nefarious ends. Tony and Tia aren't sure where they're running to, except for the map they discover in Tia's box, emblazoned with double suns, and the memories of a watery crash — snippets of recall that pronounce themselves as the two move closer to Witch Mountain and the salvation that seems to await them there. Befriended by the widowed and bitter RV enthusiast Jason O'Day (Eddie Albert), who is moved by the children's' plight, Tony and Tia will eventually reach the place of a predestined rendezvous and discover where they really come from.

Richards was already an established child actor at the time **Escape to Witch Mountain** was released, having made many commercials and television appearances, in addition to 54 episodes of *Nanny and the Professor* (1970). She followed **Escape to Witch Mountain** with *No Deposit, No Return* (1976) and *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), in which her character meets a shocking end. Her younger sister, Kyle Richards, makes an appearance in **Escape to Witch Mountain**, portraying the younger Tia. Their half-sister, Kathy, went on to gain a different kind of notoriety as a Hilton and mother of Paris and Nicki.

Ike Eisenmann, now known as Lake Eisenmann, moved behind the camera in 1987 after a rich television career. He works as a sound technician and directs and produces animated projects.

Director John Hough (*The Legend of Hell House*, 1973) was well-versed in horror and suspense when he took on *Escape to Witch Mountain*, beginning in the UK as assistant director on *The Avengers* (1961). He returned, as did Richards and Eisenmann, for *Return from Witch Mountain* (1978).

That television staple of the '70s and '80s Denver Pyle (*Dukes of Hazard*, 1979) plays Uncle Bené, who has been looking for Tony and Tia since their spaceship crash-landed. And '70s teen star Lance Kerwin (*James at 15*, 1977), makes a short appearance in the film as one of Tony and Tia's fellow orphans, as does a young actor named Dermott Downs, who was often misidentified afterwards as another red-headed child star by the name of Johnny Whitaker.

The distinctive score for the movie was written by Johnny Mendel, who also composed the music for the film and television versions of *MASH*.

Escape to Witch Mountain was remade in 1995 and another version is due to be released in 2009, titled *Race to Witch Mountain*, in which Richards and Eisenmann will both make appearances.

Producer: Jerome Courtland
Director: John Hough
Screenplay: Robert Malcolm Young; Alexander Key (book)
Cinematography: Frank Phillips
Art Direction: John B. Mansbridge, Al Roelofs
Music: Johnny Mandel
Film Editing: Robert Stafford
Cast: Eddie Albert (Jason O'Day), Ray Milland (Aristotle Bolt), Donald Pleasence (Lucas Deranian), Kim Richards (Tia Malone), Ike Eisenmann (Tony Malone), Walter Barnes (Sheriff Purdy), Reta Shaw (Mrs. Grindley), Denver Pyle (Uncle Bene), Alfred Ryder (Astrologer), Lawrence Montaigne (Ubermann), Terry Wilson (Biff Jenkins).
C-98m. Letterboxed. Closed captioning.

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