

Merida sets her sights on glory at the Oscars



ON TARGET: Brave has grossed more than £300 million at the box office, but can it emulate the success of Braveheart, right, at the Academy Awards?

SCOTLAND is set for Oscar glory this year with the animated film Brave being tipped to emulate the success of Braveheart 17 years ago.

Back in 1996, Mel Gibson's historical epic about William Wallace and the struggle for Scottish independence won five Academy Awards, including best picture.

Now its near-namesake, also set in Scotland's distant past, is odds-on with the bookies to win an Oscar for best animated feature next month.

And speculation is intensifying that Disney Pixar will commission a sequel to the film, which has grossed more than £300 million at cinemas worldwide and was one of the best-selling DVDs in the run-up to Christmas. Braveheart was controversial in Scotland because of the way in which it

By **Brian Pendreigh**

tampered with historical facts – and because film-makers chose to shoot mainly in Ireland.

But Brave was an entirely fictional story about the young Princess Merida, voiced by Kelly Macdonald, who rebels against her parents' efforts to turn her into a lady and choose her a husband.

The production team of the computer-animated film did extensive research in Scotland and many of the settings in the film were based on actual places, including the Callanish standing stones on Lewis and Eilean Donan and Dunnottar castles.

Market research shows films can play an important role in the choice of holiday

destinations, promoting not just specific locations but entire countries, and the VisitScotland tourism body spent £7 million on marketing tied directly to Brave.

It is still assessing the impact of the film, but an Oscar would provide more free advertising for Scotland and a sequel would almost certainly provide a further boost for the local tourist industry.

Paddy Power bookies give odds of 13-8 on Brave winning the animation Oscar and also see it as a serious contender for best song with Touch The Sky, sung by Scots folk artist Julie Fowlis.

Several bookies even see it as a contender for best picture, with odds varying from 33-1 to 66-1, although the front-runners are the heavyweight Lincoln, about the abolition of slavery in the US, and the musical Les

Misérables. No animated film has ever won the best picture Oscar and only three have even been nominated, including Pixar's Toy Story 3.

Pixar seems increasingly keen to make further instalments of its hits, with a Monsters Inc 'prequel' due next year, while the company is now said to be working on Toy Story 4 and developing a sequel to Finding Nemo.

No one at Disney or Pixar would say if Brave 2 is also on the drawing-board, but industry commentator Jonathan Melville, editor of the ReelScotland website, said: 'With Monsters Inc spawning a sequel more than ten years after its release, I wouldn't be surprised if Brave's creators decide to return to Merida's world to find out how she's getting on.'

'Magic bullet' hope for battling obesity

Drug could prevent weight gain from junk foods

By **Kate Foster**

A REVOLUTIONARY drug allowing slimmers to eat what they like without putting on weight has been created by Scottish scientists.

The new pill has been dubbed a 'magic bullet' as it could potentially aid the fight against obesity.

The drug fenretinide works by preventing the body from absorbing too much sugar or fat from food.

Doctors are now preparing to embark on a major trial involving thousands of Scots who have failed to stick to traditional diets.

Almost two-thirds of Scottish adults are classed as overweight despite relentless healthy eating messages from the government and health professionals.

Other drugs designed to combat the problem have been found to have unpleasant side-effects. Experts believe this is not the case with fenretinide.

The four-year £270,000 research project has been funded by the British Heart Foundation.

Yesterday researcher Dr Nimesh Mody, of the University of Aberdeen, said that in theory, patients could 'eat cake and crisps and take a



DIET: The drug could help slimmers

pill and everything will be okay'. He added: 'I think there is great potential for fenretinide to be used to treat obesity. We have identified the way it works. It stops the body from gaining more fat.'

When the drug was first created several years ago it was seen as a potential cancer treatment. Scientists, however, were disappointed

when it did not live up to expectations in fighting tumours.

But Dr Mody and his colleagues continued to study the drug. Through trials on mice, they tested its potential as a means of fighting obesity and diabetes.

Fenretinide is an artificial compound based on Vitamin A, which is important in governing the way in which the body stores fat and uses sugar – or glucose – from food.

'New treatments are needed'

Dr Mody added: 'Breast cancer trials showed it as safe, although not particularly effective, in treating cancer, but we have been looking at it as a potential anti-obesity treatment.'

'We have identified the key way it works by altering the way the body uses vitamin A to control how fat and glucose are used. Next we are hoping to get funding for a clinical trial in humans.'

Experts agree the best way to keep to a healthy weight is not to overeat

and to take regular exercise. But it is hoped the drug might work for obese patients who simply cannot stick to a diet.

Tam Fry, of the National Obesity Forum, welcomed the research.

He said: 'This is certainly worthy of consideration. Mice are the proving ground for human medications. The clinical trials stated are vital, however, to eliminate the chance of unwanted side-effects.'

'Unfortunately, in the last few years, quick fixes for obesity weight loss have had to be withdrawn because of unexpected and adverse outcomes.'

Professor Jeremy Pearson, associate director at the British Heart Foundation, is also optimistic about the drug's prospects.

He said: 'For most people, the most important way to lose weight is to choose a healthy diet and exercise regularly.'

'However, new treatments are needed to tackle obesity in patients where lifestyle changes alone can't help enough.'

'This study adds to the evidence that fenretinide may be a useful treatment to combat obesity in people with diabetes, and sheds new light on how the drug works.'

Fears over failure of disclosure checks

By **Andrew Picken**

SCOTTISH POLITICAL EDITOR

HUNDREDS of Scots have been wrongly branded criminals over the past three years due to inaccurate record checks.

New figures show just over half the 855 disclosure checks disputed since 2010 have been upheld.

Disclosure Scotland – the body that checks if people have criminal records for employers and voluntary groups – said the majority of cases were down to mistaken identity or where inaccurate information had been given, often by the police.

Yesterday, Alison McInnes, justice spokeswoman for the Scottish Liberal Democrats, who obtained the figures through freedom of information, said: 'Ministers must look into these findings and seek to bring down the rate of upheld disputed disclosures.'

'Uncertainty around information held on a criminal record check can be humiliating for the would-be volunteer or worker.'

A spokesman for Disclosure Scotland said: 'To put these figures in context, Disclosure Scotland processed over 1.2 million disclosure applications in 2012 alone.'