Terrence Malick, the elusive and faintly mysterious director of four films that arguably stand as masterpieces one and all, usually brings the film world to a dead halt when he releases a new work. *Badlands* was a stunning début in 1973; kick-starting the careers of its lead actors Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek, it made cinematic poetry of its young-lovers-on-the-run narrative. *Days of Heaven* (1978) is regarded by many cinematographers as the most beautiful film ever committed to celluloid, and *The Thin Red Line*, Malick’s 1998 piece, was rapturously received around the world (by critics at least; many cinemagoers found the film too demanding, and its philosophy too convoluted, to stay with it). That film brought its director back into the limelight after twenty years in obscurity, and it stands as the most deeply felt anti-war film since *Platoon*.

*The New World* is Malick’s followup, and it’s breathtaking, which makes its miniscule cinema release all the more mystifying, and the appearance of this DVD particularly welcome. Telling the story of the legendary Pocahontas (without once mentioning her name) Malick has crafted a gorgeous human drama around this fascinating figure. Newcomer Q’Orianka Kilcher plays Pocahontas, the woman whose beauty and strength would endure as the stuff of folklore across four centuries, while Colin Farrell plays John Smith, the British sailor who landed in the Americas and fell in love with a woman whose culture would immediately be put under threat by his own. Christopher Plummer, David Thewlis and Christian Bale all appear in supporting roles, and contribute vivid and finely-judged performances to this meticulously crafted film.

Malick makes the most heartfelt and intelligent films major studios are willing to bankroll. He has done this again with *The New World*, a film that, while long, slow and emotionally demanding, builds to a powerfully haunting conclusion. To take a story that has been told many times before and render it utterly new is a rare feat; to do this as sublimely and as vividly as Malick does here is almost magical.

Five stars.

Nick Prescott.