

The Nun

12A, 140min

★★★★☆

Almost impossible to disentangle from the profoundly seedy genre that it established (“nunsplotation” — see *The Devils* or *Killer Nun*), this restored 1966 melodrama from Jacques Rivette begins with startling and serious intent.

Adapted from the novel by Denis Diderot, it opens in Paris in 1757, with a broadside on the hypocrisy of the church (the film was briefly banned in France) and the mass incarceration of young women in convents run as profit-making institutions.

The narrative focus shifts to the rebellious Suzanne, played with rock star swagger by Anna Karina (like a young Angelina Jolie). Suzanne is thrown into a nunnery against her will (her upper-class parents are cash-strapped) and the narrative unfolds as a purgatorial struggle between Suzanne and a system, with cruel and brutal nuns, that tries to break her down into absolute compliance.

It's often gripping drama, yet it becomes pervy towards the end, with stylised beatings and mock bondage that drift slightly too far towards the phwoar factor. **KM**



Rrrraaahh! Will Mellor as Lord Soini dispatches another foe in *Of Gods and Warriors*, a feast of gratuitous blood and swordplay

A bloodthirsty Thor bore

Not even girl power can save this Viking saga, says **Larushka Ivan-Zadeh**

This low-budget Viking drama is an undistinguished effort even within its undistinguished historic/action subgenre. However, it does pack a secret weapon in the commanding form of the English newcomer Anna Demetriou, who radiates star power.

She's Helle, a warrior princess, scarlet of tress, luscious of lips and

Of Gods and Warriors

18, 91min

★★★★☆

leather of trousers, who is forced into hiding after her wicked uncle (Timo Nieminen), urged by Loki the god of mischief, frames her for her father's murder. Luckily Terence Stamp's Odin is around just about long enough — in what appears to be half a day's work of wearing a blanket and looking grave — to guide her back to reclaim the throne of the mythical kingdom of Volsung.

The girl-power theme may be driven home with all the subtlety

of Thor's hammer, but it's still refreshing to find amid all the beefy men in animal skins going “Rrrraaahh!” while gleefully decapitating each other.

Gratuitous blood and swordplay naturally abound — Viking fans wouldn't have it otherwise. You do hope that lines such as, “Eat our horses? What kind of monsters do you take us for? We will eat your women,” are tongue-in-cheek, but quite possibly they are not.

**Tracking Edith**

PG, 92min

★★★★☆

Edith Tudor-Hart, *above*, the Austrian-British photographer turned Soviet spy, is the fascinating subject of this fitful and often infuriatingly vague documentary that aims to uncover the “truth” behind the woman, but dissolves into its own distractions.

Directed by Tudor-Hart's great-nephew Peter Stephan Jungk (family connections to the subject matter are not always a good sign), the film bounces around the nodes of her life (her early work as a photographer, her enthusiasm for communism and her contact with the spymaster Arnold Deutsch) without digging deep or delivering a coherent narrative.

Instead Jungk pings off in random directions, wasting precious screen time with pointless analysis of minor-league spies, such as the Austrian physicist Engelbert Broda.

Eventually, Jungk meets an ex-KGB agent who suggests to him that all the answers he needs (and that the film needs) can be found in the Moscow archives of the FSB, the KGB's successor. If only Jungk can find the temerity and the resilience to gain access to this top secret treasure trove. He can't. **KM**

The Giant Pear

U, 78min

★★★★☆

“Is this the new *James and the Giant Peach*?” my six-year-old asked. No. However, this friendly and colourful Danish cartoon (it's dubbed) should keep most four to seven-year-olds engaged, thus buying their parents 78 precious minutes of peace.

In a sunny town called Sunnyside, we meet Sebastian, a timid elephant, and a female kitten called Mitcho. Illogically they are the same size, but it's extremely advisable not to get hung up about such matters.

A perversely overcomplicated series of events leads to the pals, plus an atomic scientist, setting to sea inside the titular giant pear to rescue Sunnyside's beloved mayor from a mysterious island, called the Mysterious Island.

Along the way they learn about loyalty and resilience while facing down some appropriately mild peril. There are a couple of inspired visual touches, but we aren't talking Pixar-like sophistication here. As computer animation goes, *The Giant Pear* proves seriously small potatoes. **LI-Z**

**Detective Dee: The Four Heavenly Kings**

12A, 131min

★★★★☆

This is the third outing for the Tang dynasty detective with a neat Poirot moustache who combines Holmesian observation with balletic fighting skills that defy gravity. The Dee blockbusters are huge in Hong Kong and China, where they continue the Wuxia tradition of martial arts — *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon* being the best-known example over here. This threequel blends Wuxia's trademark spellbinding, no-wire acrobatics with a comic lightness of touch that should engage any Dee newbies.

The story of political skulduggery, sorcery and a 4ft talking goldfish is challenging to follow — blink and miss a subtitle and you're sunk — but the gist is that Dee (Mark Chao) is given a dragon-taming mace that is coveted by the scheming Empress (Carina Lau, in costumes to die for) and her Mystic clan, as well as the new



Sichun Ma plays an assassin

baddies the Wind Warriors, an Indian mind-control cult described as “dangerous people with weird skills” — possibly something got lost in translation there.

The film's visual imagination is bogging and exhilaratingly strange. A gold monster covered with blinking red eyeballs hits home how far we are from the Marvel cinematic universe. **LI-Z**