

DVD Review: Beautiful ‘How to Train Your Dragon’ Plays Well For All Ages

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 18, 2010 - 5:00pm

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CHICAGO – “How to Train Your Dragon” is one of the best mainstream animated films of the last several years. After years of watching Pixar deservedly take home most of the critical acclaim in the medium, DreamWorks has produced a film that deserves mention in the same breath as the Pixar greats. With gorgeous visuals, strong voice work, and confident storytelling, “How to Train Your Dragon,” recently released on Blu-ray and DVD, works for all ages and will surely become one of the most highly-desired and purchased titles of the upcoming season.

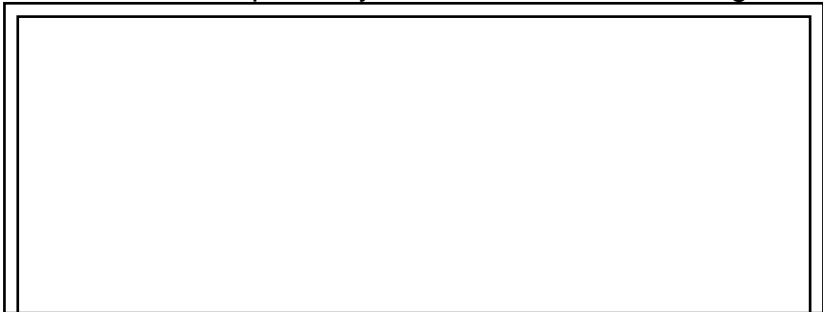


When I think of “Dragon,” the first thing that comes to mind is the stunning depth of the visuals, a beautiful combination of earth, water, and fire. It’s one of the best-looking animated films ever made. Consequently, we can’t help but point out that if you can buy it on Blu-ray, you should. Sadly, DreamWorks only had the standard edition available for us and DVD is still the only choice for most people, so we have no problem taking a look at one of the year’s best on DVD-only but buy it on Blu-ray if you can.



How to Train Your Dragon was released on Blu-ray and DVD on October 15th, 2010
Photo credit: Dreamworks

Will it still be worth it if you can’t see it in HD? Yes and no. The standard DVD release of “How to Train Your Dragon” is a bit of a disappointment. The video is a bit average for the format, as is the audio, and the special features are lackluster with two brief featurettes, a commentary, and a number of trailers. The DVD is typically-packaged with a second disc entitled “The Legend of the Boneknapper Dragon” and kids will like the new footage but adults might have liked a bit more behind-the-scenes information, storyboards, deleted concepts, etc. It feels like there is probably a wealth of material being held back for another “Special Edition” release down the HD highway.





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Photo credit: Dreamworks

The best thing about the DVD release of "How to Train Your Dragon" is definitely the film itself; a beautiful, original coming-of-age story that is easily the best Dreamworks animated film since "Shrek 2" (yes, better than "Kung Fu Panda") and could possibly be considered even better than any of the films featuring the ugly green guy. This is a gorgeous, honestly-moving adventure tale that is obviously crowd-pleasing as pleased crowds turned it into one of the bigger word-of-mouth hits of the year. The film grossed \$218 million domestically after a \$44 million opening, which is a huge number, considering most modern films make 3 or 4 times their opening week. "Dragon" made nearly 5, proving that people were seeing it again and again and telling their friends to do the same.

Jay Baruchel ("Tropic Thunder") voices Hiccup, the most awkward young man in his Viking village. He works as an apprentice to the blacksmith and warrior trainer (Craig Ferguson) and tries his best during the regular dragon attacks but he usually ends up needing saving from the fire-breathing beasts that overrun the villagers every once in awhile instead of actually fighting them.

Of course, Hiccup's father Stoick (Gerard Butler) happens to be the alpha male of the Vikings, the one who leads the way when dragons attack and the gap between the personality types of patriarch and son couldn't be wider. Hiccup tries so hard to impress his dad that he actually enters dragon training with a number of other town youth warriors including the love interest Astrid (America Ferrera), obnoxious Snotlout (Jonah Hill), dorky Fishlegs (Christopher Mintz-Plasse), and twins Tuffnut (T.J. Miller) and Ruffnut (Kristen Wiig). Things change for the young man when he injures a member of the most elusive species of dragon, the Night Fury, and learns that these creatures may not be as evil as they've been made out to be.



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Photo credit: Dreamworks

The movie takes some time to get going and build its atmosphere but the final hour of "How to Train Your Dragon" is one of the most satisfying movie hours of the year to date. It's thoroughly entertaining and often visually stunning, partially thanks to consulting from legendary cinematographer Roger Deakins ("No Country For Old Men," "The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford"). It's the little things like the shadow of the dragon or the flickering flame that distinguish one of the most visually-striking films of the form.

Luckily, the story often matches the visuals. Yes, the film travels well-trod ground in that it's about a gawky kid going from zero to hero but it does so in a completely organic, believable, and downright moving way. There is a deep political subtext in a film where one culture destroys another species without once asking if they're even violent and the next generation figuring out that they're more like house pets than rabid wolves.

"How to Train Your Dragon" is entertaining, beautiful, funny, and possibly even able to teach kids a lesson about challenging their preconceptions. What more do you want from an animated film? The home release could be better and I think there's an eventual Special Edition release that will be but the film is nearly perfect.

"How to Train Your Dragon" features voice work by Jay Baruchel, Gerard Butler, Craig Ferguson, America Ferrera, Jonah Hill, T.J. Miller, Kristen Wiig, and Christopher Mintz-Plasse. It was written and directed by Dean DeBlois & Chris Sanders. It was released on Blu-ray and DVD on October 15th, 2010.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [19]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

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