

Blu-ray Review: Laughs as Elusive as Acorns in 'Ice Age: Continental Drift'

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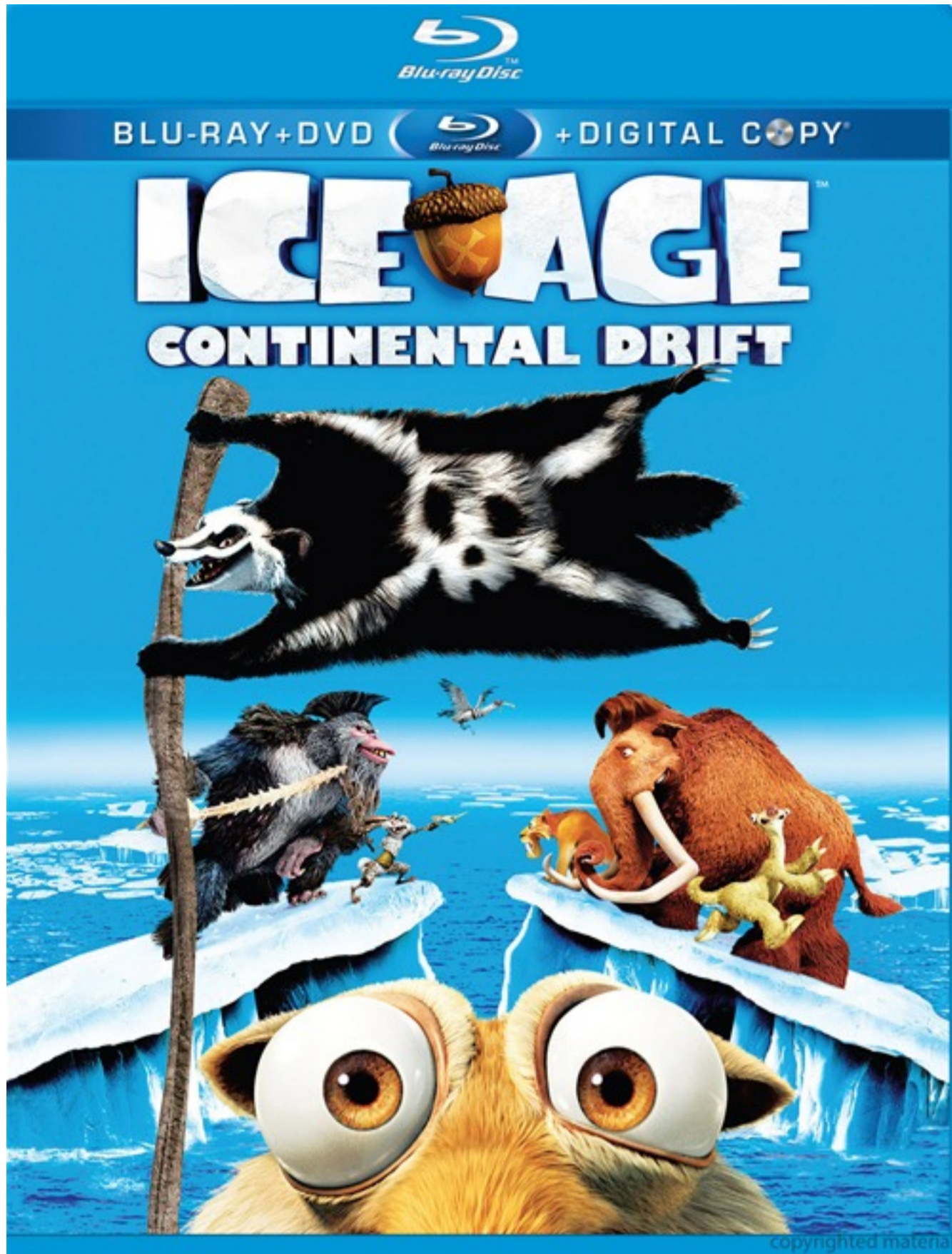
CHICAGO – It ain't over until the fat mammoth sings, and that's precisely what happens—more or less—in “Ice Age: Continental Drift,” the fourth installment of Blue Sky Studios' increasingly tedious, decade-old franchise. Why can't any of Pixar's rival animation studios come up with a marketable formula better than Celebrities Voicing Animals Delivering Tired Sitcom Dialogue?

Whereas “Madagascar 3” represented this formula operating at its finest, “Ice Age 4” represents its nadir. With 3D visuals on the level of a pop-up book and bored actors mugging their way toward their next easy paycheck, this picture is dead on arrival, yet its particularly brand of badness is more peculiar than one might expect. Just how many kiddie movies have attempted to merge DeMille-level spectacle with booger jokes? Thankfully, not that many.



Blu-ray Rating: **1.5/5.0**

In this cheery “Ice Age” entry, our heroes are running for their lives as they find the ground literally shifting beneath their feet. This latest disaster has been predictably set off by Scrat (Chris Wedge), whose lifelong pursuit of an elusive acorn led him to spin the center of the earth like a pinball, thus forming the earth's distinctive continents (science is not this franchise's strong suit). If this footage looks familiar, that's because it had been playing theatrically for months prior to the film's release as a self-contained short. As in most Scrat set-pieces, the moment-to-moment complications build to a sort of ingenious lunacy evocative of vintage Looney Tunes. It's a shame that Blue Sky hasn't attempted to make a feature-length vehicle for Scrat consisting entirely of dialogue-free slapstick. Such an audacious project would undoubtedly present its own challenges, but it would be infinitely preferable to sitting through another dull misadventure featuring the whiny Manny (Ray Romano), wisecracking Diego (Denis Leary) and lisping Sid (John Leguizamo). Apparently the impending apocalypse wasn't enough of a conflict for screenwriters Michael Burg and Jason Fuchs, who decided to toss in pirates for added commercial appeal. There's also a giant crab that prompts Sid to squeal, “Holy crab!” Warning: 88 minutes of humor like this may have an abject effect on one's merry disposition.



Ice Age: Continental Drift was released on Blu-ray and DVD on December 11th, 2012.

Photo credit: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment

Remember back when children's entertainment was about more than snarky one-liners, cultural references, shrill pratfalls and manufactured sentiment? In other words, do you remember a time before Shrek? I was lucky enough to have grown up with modern masterworks such as Disney's "The Little Mermaid" and Dianne Jackson and Jimmy T. Murakami's "The Snowman," as well as classics such as "Cinderella" and "Pinocchio" (one of many films "Ice Age 4" shamelessly rips off). These films respected the intelligence of their young viewers while allowing their imaginations to soar. Of course, such artistry always involves an element of risk, and that is precisely what a tame blockbuster like "Ice Age" lacks at its hollow core.

"Ice Age: Continental Drift" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.40:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, French and Spanish audio tracks and is available in a 3D Blu-ray/Blu-ray/DVD/digital copy combo pack stuffed with over four hours of extras. Producer John Donkin says that the concept for "Continental Drift" was inspired by the heartbreaking images of polar bears floating alone on ice drifts, while others involved in the production cite their film's various blatant homages to Homer's Odyssey. Kids have the option of viewing the movie with the "Pirate Picasso" Enhanced Coloring App and an interactive viewing mode hosted by Aziz Ansari's annoying skull-wielding rabbit, Squint. There's also a sing along option where the lyrics helpfully materialize onscreen during the pirates' instantly forgettable musical number. Far more impressive is the "sign along" option where deaf actors pop up in the corners of the screen to sign every line of dialogue in the film. This is a spectacularly good idea that deserves to be included on discs containing films that are, frankly, more worth the effort.

'Ice Age: Continental Drift' is released by Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment and stars Ray Romano, John Leguizamo, Denis Leary, Jennifer Lopez, Queen Latifah, Nicki Minaj and Peter Dinklage. It was written by Michael Berg and Jason Fuchs and directed by Steve Martino and Michael Thurmeier. It was released on December 11th, 2012. It is rated PG.

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