

Johnny Depp Spins Animation Gold in Hilarious ‘Rango’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 4, 2011 - 3:44pm

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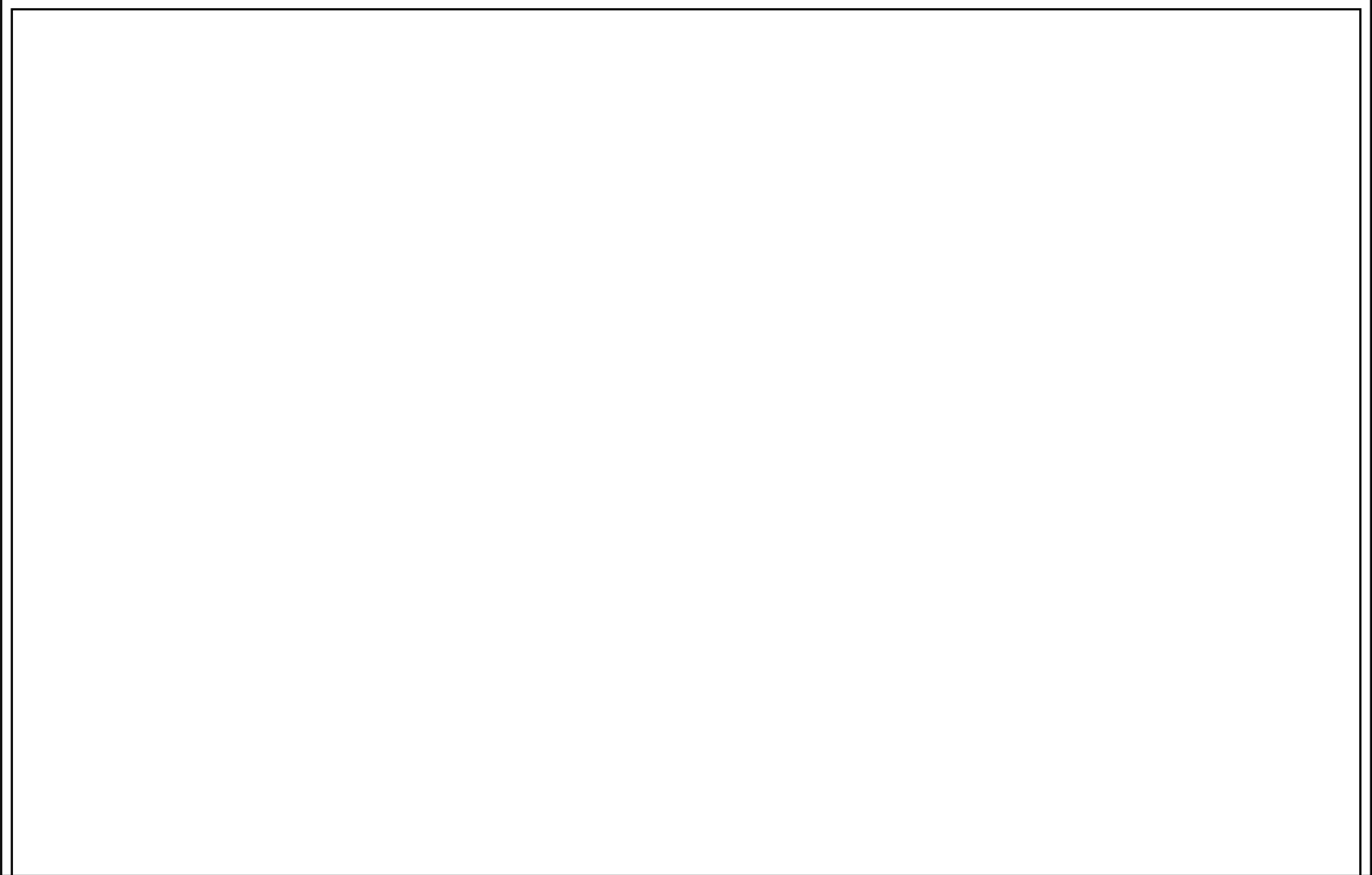
Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – When we first see the chameleon named Lars (Johnny Depp), soon to be ‘Rango,’ he is doing acting voice exercises. He is basically warming up a film that is a real hoot, and has wonderful heart.

The brilliance of Rango is that it follows a tried and true formula, it is a western that easily could have been made during the 1940s studio era, and it populates that formula with a bizarre collection of desert animals, thirsting for essential life element of water. This makes it both hysterical and heroic, a true gold mine of entertainment that works on many levels.

Lars is a domestic chameleon that lives in a fish tank. His only companions are the various toys that live with him in the tank, which he has adapted to be his personal Broadway stage (he brags of the number of plays he has concocted). This life is shattered by a freak accident, in which the fish tank is throw from a vehicle during a cross country move. Lars survives the crash, but ends up in an unforgiving desert landscape.

He first meets an armadillo named Roadkill (voice of Alfred Molina), who longs to get to the “other side” of the highway, purported to be some sort of nirvana. He directs Lars into the heat of the desert, where he is to find his destiny. This comes in the form of a strange flood, that brings him to the feet of the iguana named Beans (Isla Fisher). She is searching for the elusive water to maintain her ranch, and brings Lars to the similarly thirsty town. Lar’s yarn-spinning braggadocio gets him crowned Sheriff, and he re-invents himself as the lawman named Rango.





Coupling: Rango (Voice of Johnny Depp) and Beans (Isla Fisher) in ‘Rango’
Photo credit: © Paramount Pictures

Rango’s reputation builds through both the legend that he makes up and the lucky circumstances that makes him tougher than he seems. He clashes with the Mayor (Ned Beatty) of the town, who controls the dwindling supply of precious water. The assignment of the new Sheriff is to somehow maintain order in the face of desperate thirst and find the elusive watery gold.

It sounds like every Western on the late, late show. Naive hero is thrust into a situation where his outside-the-box thinking perplexes the unlawful and corrupt power in the town. Gary Cooper could have been Rango back in the day. The genius of the story is that they stick to it, and it just makes all the Western clichés and bravery that much more accessible. The chameleon is on a journey, and he must complete it to become the legend that he himself help create.

One running gag that really focuses the “Westernism” in the plot is a group of birds who make up a Mexican guitar band. They are the narrators of the legend of Rango, and it is mostly sly and hysterical doom-and-gloom. The singers purport to know what will happen, but they are just winging it (sorry) like Rango and the rest of us. These touches are characteristic of the creative team, with a screenplay by John Logan (“Gladiator”) and direction by long-time Johnny Depp collaborator Gore Verbinski (The “Pirates of the Caribbean” series).

The voice talent is top drawer, and was helped apparently by a recording session that actually acted out the scenes in improvisation. Isla Fisher uses a endearing southern accent for her Beans character, who is most skeptical of Rango yet becomes his greatest ally. Ned Beatty is pure corrupt power as the oily tortoise mayor, Alfred Molina is spiritual as Roadkill and there even is surprising “Spirit of the West” who becomes the protective overseer of the reluctant Rango.

The laughs come naturally and are set up with precise timing. The adventure scenes are like the spaghetti westerns meets Star Wars, with a very funny bit about riding as a group (they use what looks like ostriches instead of horses). The philosophy of the social structure, “he who controls the water controls everything” is tellingly modern, if applied to oil, food and yes, water. This comic animation also breeds a sincere morality.



The Sheriff Leads the Town Folk in a Quest for Water in 'Rango'
Photo credit: © Paramount Pictures

Pure entertainment like Rango has got to have a heart, and that beats mightily within the adventure. If anything they are too glued to the narrative, some exposition is a bit too long, but the result of it always yields a pay-off. This texture is a pleasure, and this is a night at the movies that's a real treat.

Johnny Depp has a knack for aligning himself with the filmmakers that best use his quirky brand of talent. He oozes passion in every line and stance of Rango, and brings along a merry band of producers and performers to make it so.

"Rango" opens everywhere March 4th. Featuring the voices of Johnny Depp, Isla Fisher, Abigail Breslin, Ned Beatty, Alfred Molina, Bill Nighy and Harry Dean Stanton. Screenplay by John Logan, directed by Gore Verbinski. Rated "PG"



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