

Clever, Fun Adventures of ‘The Pirates! Band of Misfits’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 26, 2012 - 3:25pm

- [Aardman Animation](#) [2]
- [Anton Yelchin](#) [3]
- [Brendan Gleeson](#) [4]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [5]
- [David Tennant](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Hugh Grant](#) [8]
- [Imelda Staunton](#) [9]
- [Jeremy Piven](#) [10]
- [Martin Freeman](#) [11]
- [Movie Review](#) [12]
- [Peter Lord](#) [13]
- [Salma Hayek](#) [14]
- [The Pirates! Band of Misfits](#) [15]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “The Pirates! Band of Misfits” has that incredible Aardman energy and elegance of works like “Wallace & Gromit” and “Chicken Run” along with some of the best voice work you’ll hear in an animated film all year. It’s not a perfect piece of family entertainment (and Aardman has made a few of those in the past...like everything feature the cheese-lover and his skeptical dog) but it’s close enough and should satisfy all of those willing to sign up for this clever ride. It’s smart, funny, and, most importantly, entertaining for multiple generations.

The gallant yet goofy lead of “The Pirates!” is wonderfully known only as The Pirate Captain (perfectly voiced by Hugh Grant) and he’s kind of a lovable loser. His men stay by his side out of loyalty, not out of any actual success at being a pirate. Pirate Captain has nowhere near the looting or pillaging track records of legends like Black Bellamy (Jeremy Piven) or Cutlass Liz (Salma Hayek), much stronger competition for the coveted title of Pirate of the Year. So when he applies for the prize, he’s basically mocked and ridiculed. Naturally, “The Pirates!” is going to be a story of an underachiever rising to the top. Although it will be so in the quirky way that only Aardman Animation can truly pull off.



The Pirates! Band of Misfits

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

The Pirate Captain has a loyal and ragtag crew led by his number two, The Pirate with a Scarf (Martin Freeman), and including The Albino

Pirate (Anton Yelchin), The Pirate with Gout (Brendan Gleeson), The Surprisingly Curvaceous Pirate (Ashley Jensen), and The Pirate Who Likes Sunsets and Kittens (Al Roker). The Captain and crew run afoul of the pirate-hating Queen Victoria (Imelda Staunton) when they arrive in Victorian London and cross historical paths with none other than Charles Darwin (David Tennant) and his faithful-yet-silent sidekick Mr. Bobo, who just happens to be a Chimp. A little bit of history, a little bit of science, a whole lot of silliness – the script for “The Pirates! A Band of Misfits” is so much smarter and more intellectually engaging for your kids than 99% of family entertainment that it makes it significantly easier to overlook the film’s flaws.

What flaws, you say? I felt myself wishing the world of “The Pirates!” felt a little more complete, fuller if you will. This is Aardman’s most ambitious film in terms of storytelling in that it goes from the high seas to the back streets of London and about a dozen places in between. And I find that the Aardman style works better in intimate settings like Wallace’s perfectly-rendered home or a chicken coop. When the pirates and their gang were out on the open waters, I found there was a depth of not just field but of storytelling that was a bit missing.



The Pirates! Band of Misfits

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

If the world of “The Pirates!” is missing something, the characters, dialogue, and storytelling are most definitely not. This is a fun, clever movie – the kind that doesn’t talk down to kids. So many family films essentially assume that children only like stupid people doing stupid things. Aardman has never done that. They don’t take the intelligence of children for granted. They don’t wallow in bodily function humor or physical pratfalls. They don’t throw in pop culture references to sell their jokes. Like the best animation houses in the world, they treat their audience with respect, bringing children and adults to the same intellectual level instead of trying to find their lowest common denominator.

It helps to have one of the most engaging voice casts in a long time. Grant strikes the perfect combination of derring-do and false bravado. He’s perfect and he’s wonderfully accompanied by some of the best comedians in the U.K. right now like Freeman and Tennant. If you don’t know who Martin Freeman and David Tennant are, you’re not paying enough attention. They both rule. Staunton, Gleeson, Jensen, Hayek – everyone is having a blast here and the infectious quality of their work carries over to the audience.

“The Pirates! Band of Misfits” is likely to get lost as families save their entertainment dollars for upcoming surefire hits like “Brave” and “Madagascar 3.” Aardman films regularly under-perform stateside. It’s too bad because their work has a timeless quality that’s missing from so many current Hollywood animated films. Kids will enjoy riding the high seas with these pirates for years. Hopefully, enough of them will do it in theaters to warrant a sequel.

“The Pirates! Band of Misfits” features voice work by Hugh Grant, Martin Freeman, David Tennant, Anton Yelchin, Brendan Gleeson, Salma Hayek, Jeremy Piven, Imelda Staunton, Ashley Jensen, and Al Roker. It was written by Gideon Defoe and directed by Peter Lord and opens on April 27, 2012.



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- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/brendan-gleeson>
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