

Pixar Scores Again With Delightful ‘Monsters University’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 21, 2013 - 8:50am

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Let’s everybody say it together, “the key to great animation is a great story.” This has to be the motto for Pixar Animation – now part of Disney. Their latest, “Monsters University,” is a prequel with a heart, soul and attention to what makes this type of entertainment work.

With a story that takes place before the first film in the series, “Monsters, Inc.,” the college bound characters of Sully and Mike (the buddy Monsters) are just as fresh as when they were the company men in movie number one. The creative team – screenwriters Robert L. Baird, Daniel Gerson and Dan Scanlon (who also directed) – expand upon the origin of the two, and imagine a sort of Harry-Potter-meets-Animal-House vibe. The adventures in the film, and the steps they take to get through those adventures, are natural, moral and very funny. The inventiveness of putting our heroes through their paces before the beginning of “Monsters, Inc.” was a stroke of genius, allowing the the animation team to whip up a fresh stew of time, place and new characters.

As the film begins, the unpopular boy monster named Mike (voice of Billy Crystal) is on a field trip with his grade school class. They are visiting his future employer, Monsters, Inc., and the magic of the place captures the aspiring “scare student.” An incident while he is there convinces him that Monsters University would be the best place to learn the scare system, and he works diligently until the end of high school to get there, and is rewarded by acceptance.



FreshMonster: Mike (Voice of Billy Crystal) Arrives in ‘Monsters University’
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

Mike’s popularity is no better as a Freshman in college, opposite to the popular Sullivan, nicknamed Sully (John Goodman). The two immediately clash, because Mike is determined to become a Scare major and Sully is a disconnected and lazy, but both can only be accepted by the Chairperson of Scare, Dean Hardscrabble (Helen Mirren). Sully and Mike end up joining a team of losers from the least desired fraternity at the school. It’s the snobs versus the slobs, and with Mike and Sully there may be a chance to win the university’s Scare Games.

The genius of all this is even if there is no familiarity with the Monsters Inc. concept, Mike and Sully are re-introduced through this college story. The build-up of tension between the two makes for a more probable resolution, and the rooting interest builds as the Scare Game challenges mount. The “Animal House” fraternity subplot is well handled, as the collection of loser monsters is most of the comedy (“I can’t go to jail again!”).

John Goodman – who seems these days to be in every other American film – and Billy Crystal were well directed in their voice work, as Mike and Sully cement their reputations in the Cartoon Character Hall of Fame. It’s subtle, and works beautifully, as their chemistry behind a couple of monster renditions is at a high level. It’s not often that sequels can capture lightning in a bottle again, but in this case the decision to go prequel, and challenge Crystal and Goodman with fresh material, pays off in a film that lives up to the first one.

The 3D is palatable, against a backdrop of beautiful images – the campus of Monsters U. is particularly magnificent, especially in the romance of the Fall Session. The character of Dean Hardscrabble is the most “Harry Potter” like reference, as her likeness would be right at home at Hogwarts. The voice of Helen Mirren was cast in the role perfectly, and other familiar mouthpieces include Steve Buscemi, Joel Murray, Sean Hayes, Alfred Molina and Charlie Day.



Alumni: Sully (Voice of John Goodman) Wears a Letterman Jacket in ‘Monsters University’
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

In the mode of classic children’s animation – although the line is very blurred these days between children and adult audiences – the story is highly moral, with lessons involving situations like never underestimating people..er monsters, teamwork works best and of course what may seem like an enemy may just be a misunderstood friend. “Monsters University” crackles with energy because of these lessons, but never lays it on too thick. The first “Monsters, Inc.” is a minor animation classic, and it’s “sequel prequel” ain’t too shabby, either.

This film is the definition of the “summer movie”, the kind in which slipping on the 3D glasses, drinking an ocean of Coke and eating a massive tub of popcorn connects right into the rhythm of what’s up on screen, along with a seasonal fun, exciting and sunny ride.

“Monsters University” opens everywhere on June 21st in 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D theaters and show times. Featuring the voices of Billy Crystal, John Goodman, Steve Buscemi, Helen Mirren, Joel Murray, Sean Hayes, Dave Foley, Charlie Day and Alfred Molina. Screenplay by Robert L. Baird, Daniel Gerson and Dan Scanlon. Directed by Dan Scanlon. Rated “G”



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [18]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

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