

Animated 'The Boxtrolls' Has British Comic Tone

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 26, 2014 - 10:01pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Monty Python, Peter Cook & Dudley Moore, Peter Sellers, Mr. Bean, Alan Partridge – all are examples of British comedy, that off-kilter “are you in on the joke?” point of view. That comic tone has arrived in an animated film, within the stop motion world of “The Boxtrolls.”

From the same studio that brought the twisted entertainments of “Coraline” and “ParaNorman” – Laika Entertainment – “The Boxtrolls” continue their comic tradition of subtle jabs and visual humor. Full of scenic invention, it paints their characters in the film with traits that are neither good nor bad, they just have a weird sense of a different mentality. The story also celebrates the notion of being yourself, despite any background circumstances, and staying away from greed and false terror and idolatry. Take that, “Frozen”!

Based on the British storybook, “Here Be Monsters!” the story centers on a boy named Eggs (voice of Isaac Hemstead-Wright) who lives underground with the Boxtrolls – a race of down under creatures who wear boxes designating their identities (Fish, Wheels, Bucket, Eggs). They are pursued constantly by Archibald Snatcher (Ben Kingsley), an exterminator who takes advantage of the town’s fear of the Boxtrolls to justify his job.



The Gang's All Here in 'The Boxtrolls'

Photo credit: Focus Features

Eggs emerges from underground during a trash collecting mission, and witnesses the capture of his Boxtroll colleagues by Snatcher. He is determined to free his friends, and solicits the aid of Winnie (Elle Fanning), the daughter of the feckless town baron, Lord Portley-Rind (Jared Harris). Eggs changes the complexity of town politics, perceptions and bigotry, and uncovers some secrets about his past.

This is a mostly British voice cast, and they add the timbre of what is a very “Brit-centric” tenor of humor. There are those oddball moments reminiscent of Monty Python style non-sequitur, the Boxtrolls characters are prime for those type of literal and visual gags. This is not a criticism but a relief – there is no talking down to any of the audience, kid or adult, and the entertainment of the film lies in the mordant and dark quality of the humor.

The world of the Boxtrolls and the townspeople is very distinct, and visually the movements and look of the film actually takes some getting used to, it's so different and imaginative. The best thing to say about the studio that produces these evolved stop motion animation, Laika Entertainment, is that the three films they're best known for – “Coraline,” “ParaNorman” and now “The Boxtrolls” – all have their own identity and personality.

The story is a fable, and is set in a world of the vague Victorian-era past, but the themes are square onto the present. The Lord of the town sits on the council of “White Hats,” a society in which Snatcher desires entry, and the exterminator creates fear of the “other” (the Boxtrolls) to infiltrate that perceived level of status. If that is not the whole American Dream cycle, then I failed Metaphor 101. The lessons of tolerance and acceptance are nicely done, and the comeuppance for the fear mongers are justly administered.



Winnie and Eggs Trip the Light Fantastic in 'The Boxtrolls'

Photo credit: Focus Features

The voice-work is garbled British thrills, especially Jared Harris sticking his nose in the air as Lord Portley-Rind. The Cornetto comedy team of Nick Frost and Simon Pegg make appearances, and the lone American lead actor voice of Elle Fanning projects both toughness and snobbery as Winnie. The Boxtrolls sound exactly how you'd think they sound.

Animated film, in the midst of the post-technology golden age, is challenging the sense and sensibility of storytelling as it evolves. These “amusements” defy their status of mere “cartoons,” and seek in their current prestige to wear the “White Hat” of cinema art, that of contributing to overall culture.

“The Boxtrolls” opens everywhere on September 26th in 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D theaters and show times. Featuring the voices of Ben Kingsley, Jared Harris, Nick Frost, Tracy Morgan, Simon Pegg, Elle Fanning and Isaac Hempstead Wright. Screenplay adapted by Irene Brignull and Adam Pava, from the novel by Alan Snow. Directed by Graham Annable and Anthony Stacchi. Rated “PG”



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