

## ‘Penguins of Madagascar’ is Definitely No Turkey

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 27, 2014 - 8:04am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The only thing rarer than a spinoff that soars over its inspiration is a DreamWorks Animation production without “Dragon” in the title, and one that’s actually worth watching. Improbably, “Penguins Of Madagascar” is both.

To be honest, I’ve felt the “Madagascar” series to be typical of DreamWorks decidedly second-tier status in the field of animation. They lacked the imagination of Pixar’s best efforts, and settled for the usual collection of celebrity voices and overly hyperactive animation, topped off with a generic frenetic dance sequence that fades from memory before the beat even stops. While “Penguins” doesn’t exactly set itself apart per se, it does freshen up the formula and shows why it became popular in the first place.



Group Portrait of the Heroes in ‘Penguins of Madagascar’

*Photo credit: 20th Century Fox*

This film sends the quartet of Skipper, Kowalski, Private, and Rico into their own secret agent spy adventure beginning with an inventive heist at Fort Knox. They wind up going head to head with an evil octopus – voiced by John Malkovich – bent on revenge after the Penguins arrived at his zoo and stole the adoring public’s affection.

I wasn’t a huge fan of the overly militarized quartet of flightless birds in the original trio of films, so I am as shocked as anyone that they are

able to truly soar once they aren’t weighed down by celebrity sad sacks David Schwimmer and Ben Stiller. And in an earlier review I mentioned the troubling dark nature of the revenge plot in Disney’s “Big Hero 6,” but the revenge plot here is pitched at the cartoonish level of a James Bond movie. It’s very hard to take seriously, or pay too much attention to – the jokes are flying fast and furiously, and more often than not they actually hit their targets.

Malkovich has such a gift for Bond villainy it’s a shame he hasn’t gotten a chance to play one in real life. Here he gets to indulge his great scenery-chewing abilities and the animation is entertainingly energetic. The same goes for the wordplay which will soar right over most kids, but will give moms and dads something to smile about. One of the movie’s best running gags involves the names of Malkovich’s army of octopus henchman – who all share monikers with famous movie stars. So a typical command will be “Halle! Bury them!”



Benedict Cumberbatch is the Voice of Classified in ‘Penguins of Madagascar’

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

Kowalski – voiced by Chris Miller – frequently steals the show, offering just the kind of brutally honest advice Skipper doesn’t need at a time of crisis. And Benedict Cumberbatch provides voice support as Classified, an interspecies team leader of secret agents who swoop in trying to save the day.

“Penguins of Madagascar” never achieves the stunning levels of “Toy Story” or “Up,” and it’s not quite the laugh-a-minute joke machine that was “The Lego Movie.” But it is solid piece of entertainment with plenty of jokes for children and grownups alike. It’s cinematic comfort food done just right.

*“Penguins of Madagascar” is now playing everywhere. Featuring the voices of John Malkovich, Benedict Cumberbatch, Chris Miller, Tom McGrath, Christopher Knights, Conrad Vernon, Werner Herzog, Andy Richter and Ken Jeong. Screenplay by John Aboud, Michael Colton, Eric Darnell, Tom McGrath and Brandon Sawyer. Directed by Eric Darnell and Simon J. Smith Rated “PG”*



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