

Nothing of Substance in Cute, Fluffy ‘Minions’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 9, 2015 - 9:24pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – They’re cute, they talk like babies, and they already have “brand recognition.” In what feels like a product exercise rather than a movie, “Minions” extends its story from the dawn of time to 1968. Did we need that much back story? The voices of Sandra Bullock and Jon Hamm star.

There is nothing wrong with “Minions,” it delivers a paint by numbers wacky comedy (mostly for kids) about the need of those yellow creatures to follow the most despicable among us – although that comes with the caveat that good will prevail (there cannot be a risk of losing plush doll sales in the Christian demographic). The film looks great, with sharp-lined animation and set pieces that are perfect for 3D viewing. But getting the “Minions” writing assignment must be the biggest cakewalk in show business (right, Brian Lynch?). None of the jokes have to work, none of the story has to make sense, and classic rock on the soundtrack is easy and familiar. While Pixar is throwing down with complex and passionate animated classics like “Inside Out,” the producers of “Minions” can ride their coattails with a whole bunch of nothingness.

At the dawn of time, the “Minions” crawl from the sea, and instinctively gravitate to serve the most despicable creatures on land. After failing to hook up in the dinosaur era, they start in with a series of homo sapiens (man), each more disastrous than the other. A lost war with Napoleon cause the Minions to hibernate for awhile, in the frozen North Pole region (Holiday pitch: Minions help Satan, I mean Santa).



Stuart, Kevin and Bob Are ‘Minions’

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

The problem is the tribe eventually has no purpose. It takes one special Minion named Kevin to identify the need to find another criminal master. He sets off from the Great White North with Bob and Stuart, to America in 1968. Amid the groovy fashions, they find a criminal element in an evil lady named Scarlet Overkill (voice of Sandra Bullock), who lives in a lair in Swinging London, with her husband Herb (Jon Hamm). Their first assignment – steal the crown jewels.

Setting the action in the late 1960s allows the scenario creators to crank out the ‘60s jams (I smell soundtrack sales!) with lazy and obvious selections from The Doors, The Who, The Kinks, The Turtles and even The Beatles. The rest of the 1960s settings is barely used, save for the cars and the clothes. The Minions are the star, and whatever they do in any era, it has nothing to do with that era.

The series that feature the Minions (“Despicable Me,” “Despicable Me 2” and this film) use the cuddly yellow guys (how do they reproduce?) as punchlines to fart jokes, inappropriate underwear jokes and cartoon violence jokes stolen from the last hundred years of animation. There is nothing original about the zeitgeist of the Minions, other than they can be used in any type of comic exploitation, which makes them easier to write for than Bob Hope.

The super-villains are a puzzlement as well. The Minions are defined as having to serve evil, but their presence with those bad guys and gals mostly serve to defeat them. So instead of helping out Scarlet Overkill (Sandra Bullock having a bit of fun), as they are put on earth to do, they mostly make her life miserable, thus going against their predestination. The creators can have their yellow cake and eat it too – they can make impossibly stupid evil villains, and use the cuddly cuteness to have “good” win at the end. Like the money sucking symbolic monarchy of Britain, for example.



Herb (voice of Jon Hamm) and Scarlet Overkill (Sandra Bullock) in ‘Minions’

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

But there is good news, the film is spectacular to look at. The trippy beginning shows the amoebic Minions in the sea, following the predators that eventually get them to land. The animators use the full impact of 3D, including a hypnotism effect that would work beautifully with some outside enhancement (now legal in some states!). New York City and London circa 1968 look great, along with the cars, fashions and use of images with the lazy classic rock. It’s only 91 minutes, and there is enough eye candy to be tolerable in that category.

As I was writing this, the McDonald’s commercial came on, featuring the “Summer of Minions.” And that is a reminder of the yellow dudes greatest accomplishment, establishing their brand in a way that was big enough to get their own movie, and get their own sponsorship from Big Mac. Even in their Minion baby talk, “Ka-ching” always translates.

“Minions” opens everywhere on July 10th, in 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D theaters and showtimes. Featuring the voices of Sandra Bullock, Jon Hamm, Michael Keaton, Allison Janney, Steve Coogan, Geoffrey Rush and Steve Carell. Written by Brian Lynch. Directed by Kyle Balda and Pierre Coffin. Rated “PG”



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