

DreamWorks' 'Monsters vs. Aliens' Has Great 3D Concept, But Falls Flat

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 27, 2009 - 12:09pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Hasn't [Pixar](#) [16] proven that animation can be more than just concept and celebrity voice work? The problem with "[Monsters vs. Aliens](#)" [17] is that the team behind it clearly prioritized nearly every element of the film over actual storytelling. It looks good, has some talented people behind the mic, and is visually engaging, but there's nothing memorable about the script at all. The 3D may pop, but the story is flat.

Rob Letterman (writer/director of "Shark Tale") and Conrad Vernon (director of "Shrek 2") direct a script that took five writers to bring to the big screen and feels like it was haphazardly constructed like kids playing the story game on a playground. One kid starts the story and then another picks it up and so on and so on.



B.O.B.(Seth Rogen), The Missing Link (Will Arnett) and Dr. Cockroach, Ph.D. (Hugh Laurie) introduce themselves to their new monster roommate.
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"Monsters vs. Aliens" pushes its 3D gimmick from the very beginning, opening with an asteroid belt designed to provoke oohs and aahs and moving into a sky watcher bouncing a rubber ball into the audience. Kids will be impressed. Adults will remember that 3D is just a trick, not an actual storytelling device.

Through that asteroid belt, a giant space rock hurtles toward the Earth. The debris is headed right for the wedding of Susan ([Reese Witherspoon](#) [18]) and Derek ([Paul Rudd](#) [19]) and the poor bride gets slammed to the ground, slowly turning into Ginormica, the film's variation on the 50-Foot Woman.

Susan/Ginormica is captured and thrown in an underground vault with four other monsters - the giant Insectosaurus, the mad scientist in a bug's body known as Dr. Cockroach ([Hugh Laurie](#) [20]), the ego-driven Missing Link ([Will Arnett](#) [21]), and the body and brain-less B.O.B. ([Seth Rogen](#) [22]). The monsters seem doomed to a dull life in a mysterious underground bunker until...

It turns out that the giant space rock had an element being sought by a power-mad alien ([Rainn Wilson](#) [23]). He sends a robot down to claim

it, bringing the President ([Stephen Colbert](#) [24]) out to greet the new “very big wonder”. When things go very wrong in the meeting of the interstellar powers, General W.R. Monger ([Kiefer Sutherland](#) [25]) suggests to the leader of the free world that the only way to stop the alien invasion is to unleash the monsters, promising them their freedom if they save our skins.



These Monsters—The Missing Link (Will Arnett), Ginormica (Reese Witherspoon), B.O.B.(Seth Rogen), Insectosaurus and Dr. Cockroach, Ph.D. (Hugh Laurie)—are defenders of the planet.

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A few of the set pieces, especially those clearly authored with 3D in mind, look undeniably impressive. When Susan literally glows during her wedding, when the monsters use the Golden Gate Bridge as a weapon, and the final battle sequence - all of these set pieces have a visceral, action-driven fun, but even within them there's no reason to care about anything that's happening. Most video games have more character development than “Monsters vs. Aliens”.

The problem is that the writers WANT there to be a heartwarming story about being who you want to be. The idea being that even a monster can save the world. But it doesn't work. If they had pumped up the references to old movie monsters and aliens and gone just for the thrill ride, that could have been effective but the attempts at character, like the fact that Derek doesn't stand by Susan when she grows big enough to crush him, fall totally flat.

Worst of all, “Monsters vs. Aliens” just isn't funny. There are two or three solid chuckles, but that's it. The celebrities do a reasonably good job, especially Witherspoon and Rogen, but a shocking number of jokes hit the ground with a thud. It's just not clever enough.

Without characters to care about or clever dialogue, all that's left in “MvA” is the pretty pictures and, for some, that will be enough. The 3D looks good but the backgrounds aren't nearly as richly developed as they should be. Visually, it's not nearly as memorable as “[Coraline](#) [26]”.

With the concept over storytelling and emphasis on the visuals, I often felt like “Monsters vs. Aliens” played like a preview for a longer, more rewarding experience. Then I realized it IS a preview. It's a preview for the video games, toys, inevitable sequel, thrill rides, and so on and so on. When you can see previews online for free, why pay to see one in the theaters just because it's in 3D?

'Monsters vs. Aliens' stars the voices of Reese Witherspoon, Hugh Laurie, Seth Rogen, Will Arnett, Rainn Wilson, Stephen Colbert, Kiefer Sutherland, and Paul Rudd. It was written by Maya Forbes, Wally Wolodarsky, Rob Letterman, Jonathan Aibel, and Glenn Berger and directed by Conrad Vernon & Rob Letterman. It opens on March 27th, 2009. It is rated PG.



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