

"Monsters, Inc." scares up more than childish laughter



Internet graphic

John Goodman and Billy Crystal lend their comic voices to "Monsters, Inc." coworkers Sully and Mike in Disney's hilarious look at life as a monster.

Disney's latest animated opus is a huge success and provides laughs for all audiences.

By Max Turner
Features Editor

Children's movies, or so-called "family films," are always a gamble. There are those, like "Toy Story" and "The Wizard of Oz," that tell magical stories that truly do charm audiences of all ages. Then there are those, like "Surf Ninjas," that simply rely on falling and flatulence to zero in on the target audience and offer nothing more. Disney's latest computer animated masterpiece, "Monsters, Inc." follows in the tradition of the former, telling the charming story of two monster friends with such wit and charm that even the most cynical of audiences could not help but be wooed by its innocent pleasures.

"Monsters, Inc." takes its setting in the fictional city of Monstropolis, a city inhabited entirely by monsters. Their world exists parallel to the human and the only connection is through children's closet doors. It is the job of the workers at Monsters, Inc. to travel through these closet doors in an organized fashion, and cause children to scream. The screams are then collected in tubes and used as

energy to power Monstropolis.

"Monsters, Inc." follows the escapades of two workers, Sully (John Goodman), a blue and green-haired giant on the verge of setting Monsters, Inc.'s all-time scares record, and Mike (Billy Crystal), a one-eyed green ball.

One night while working late, Sully stumbles upon a closet door that has been left out. Letting his curiosity get the best of him, he ventures through the door and inadvertently lets the

What makes this and other Disney-Pixar collaborations so special is their wit, spirit, and ability to communicate to any generation....Never do the writers resign themselves to bathroom or bland slapstick humor that is such an easy way to amuse children.

child on the other side through the door. It is assumed in Monstropolis that children are toxic, so the minute it becomes public knowledge that a child is loose, the city goes into panic. It is up to Mike and Sully to get

the child safely back into its room without authorities getting it, hurting it, and getting Sully in trouble for letting it through in the first place.

The premise isn't especially revolutionary and all the usual Disney bad guys and sidekicks are there, but this isn't where "Monsters, Inc." achieves its magic. What makes this and the other Disney-Pixar collaborations so special is their wit, spirit, and ability to communicate to any generation. "Monsters, Inc." is able to strike that perfect balance in which there are enough simple jokes to keep younger

audiences amused, and there are at the same time enough other jokes to keep the rest of the audience awake and attentive.

In "Monsters, Inc.," however, not even the simpler jokes are so mindless as to repel mature audiences, though. Never do the writers resign themselves to bathroom or bland slapstick humor that is such an easy to amuse child audiences.

... "Monsters, Inc." tells its story with such wit and charm that even the most cynical audience could not help but be wooed by its simple pleasures.

"Monsters, Inc." will inevitably draw comparisons to "Shrek," this summer's huge animated success, especially in light of the new Oscar category for Best Animated Feature. "Shrek" was not without merit, but "Monsters, Inc." proves that Disney is still the master of animation. "Shrek" did appeal to more than just children, but it did so at the sake of the good-spiritedness of most kids movies. While "Shrek" took an almost cynical tone, "Monsters, Inc." is able to maintain its innocence

and avoid cheesiness, a much more impressive feat.

Furthermore, "Shrek's" pop culture references were heavy-handed and obvious while "Monsters, Inc." maintains pop culture references that are more subtle and, therefore, rewarding. In "Shrek," for instance, a princess is seen in a fight scene and, in perfectly predictable fashion, jumps in the air and floats a la "Matrix." In "Monsters, Inc.," on the other hand, references can be found as subtle as a restaurant named Harryhausen's, the name of a famous monster special effects artist.

Also, "Monsters, Inc." transcends the usual children's themes on beauty or fairness and includes a subplot addressing energy concerns. Monstropolis is in the face of a scream shortage, and on either side of the issue, there are those monsters who attempt to find new means to suck screams out of children and those who look for alternatives to scream. It's not the most complex of themes, but it addresses a modern-day concern under the coat of a children's fantasy, a feat that could only be so gracefully pulled off by the people of Disney and Pixar.

The adventures of Sully and Mike are engaging and hilarious at any age. Look past the G rating and "family film" label, and "Monsters, Inc." can offer a wonderful escape for any audience.

Monsters, Inc.

*** 1/2 (out of ****)

Starring: Billy Crystal, John Goodman, and James Coburn

Directed By: Pete Doctor

Rated G

Now Playing at: The Grande, Brassfield Cinemas, and Carmike Cinemas



1605 Battleground Ave.
Greensboro, NC 27408
(336) 272-8400

400 E. Cornwallis Road
Greensboro, NC 27405
(336) 378-1000

2501 High Point Road
Greensboro, NC 27403
(336) 294-4060

Present this coupon
and get a
Steak and Cheese Sub
with an Iced Tea
for only
\$4.89!