

Adorable Orphans Charm Diabolical Villain in Heartwarming Animated Adventure

Written by Film Review by Kam Williams



Despicable Me

Despite the fact that the title character at the center of *Despicable Me* might sound a little bit like Shrek, don't let any superficial similarities discourage you from catching this equally-delightful animated adventure. Yes, at first blush, its ugly antihero is reminiscent of the much-beloved ogre, but it doesn't take long for this variation on the theme to blossom into a thoroughly original persona.

Gru (Steve Carrell) is a hook-nosed hunchback with a vaguely Transylvanian accent who has singlehandedly ruined the otherwise idyllic slice of suburbia where he resides. Everyone on the block has learned to give the gruesome-looking misanthrope a wide berth; after all, his house is not only painted black but surrounded by a dead lawn. Plus, whenever he ventures into town in his road-hogging, jet-propelled tank, he tends to cause minor disturbances, like when he used one of his inventions to freeze everyone on line in front of him at the local coffee shop.

None of Gru's intimidated neighbors have any idea that he's secretly a megalomaniac poised to hatch an elaborate heist from his basement laboratory with the help of a loyal army of miniature minions. And why is he bent on world domination? Because he's frustrated with being only the second most evil villain around, right behind the diabolical Vector (Jason Segel) who has just stolen the Great Pyramid at Giza and replaced it with an inflatable replica. Gru hopes to eclipse his competition and become #1 by using his latest invention, the shrink-ray gun, to make the moon disappear.

However, he meets his match the day that a trio of innocent orphans selling cookies door-to-door naively rings the bell. For Margo (Miranda Cosgrove), Edith (Dana Gaier) and Agnes (Elsie Fisher) are so desperate to be adopted that they manage to ignore the mean

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man's gruff exterior, since all they see in him is the potential to be turned into a doting dad. He grudgingly lets the vulnerable girls move in, and their playful nature and wide-eyed requests to be read bedtime stories gradually melt his cold, cold heart.

Still, en route to the happily ever after finale, the plot thickens when the children are kidnapped by the vicious Vector, which affords Gru the opportunity to morph from selfish creep to altruistic benefactor. Meanwhile, co-directors Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud understand exactly how to employ the latest 3-D technology, and the frenetic action keeps you ducking from and reaching out to touch hovering objects as if you're right in the midst of a virtual reality. Another big plus is the original soundtrack courtesy of Pharrell Williams whose mellow mix of hip-hop and retro R&B makes the experience all the more enjoyable.

The most adorable screen orphans since Annie!

Excellent (4 stars)

Rated PG for mild action and crude humor.

Running time: 95 Minutes

Studio: Universal Pictures

To see a trailer for Despicable Me, visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffxEobkkGeM>