

entertainment

Wild for 'Wild Things'

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If you were born sometime between 1960 and now, you likely are familiar with "Where The Wild Things Are", the story of the overly rambunctious Max who is dropped into a world of monsters that, like him, get a little crazy at times.

The 36-page book has been translated into a two-hour film, directed by the capable Spike Jonze and scripted by the indie-credible Dave Eggers, author of the fantastic memoir "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius" and co-founder of McSweeney's. While children's books have rarely made great material for movies, for example "The Cat in the Hat" or "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs," the movie manages to faithfully merge the original image of its creators and the core storyline of the beloved book in a fashion both epic and heartwarming.

The story follows as thus both in the book and the movie: Max, after a dispute with his mother, is transported to the land of "Wild Things". There, he stares down the monsters who inhabit the world and becomes their king. He soon learns the importance of controlling his emotions and treating others with respect. In the movie, however, the cast is greatly built upon and slight changes are made to the story, like instead of his room magically turning into the forest as in the book, Max runs away from home and sails to the forest on an abandoned dingy. Max grows the closest to the monster Carol, who is in fact male and played by James "Tony Soprano" Gandolfini. Carol shows the new king Max around the woods, introducing him to a cast of fully imagined characters.

The original story's purpose was to promote anger management. While this may sound like something best reserved for a lecture or a story starring talking farm animals, something about the text's acceptance of the Wild Things, meaning both Max and the monsters, is extremely endearing and relatable. The movie extends on this, casting each monster as an emotional archetype, leaving the viewer feeling as if he knows these monsters (I constantly had the feeling that I had met a real-life image of each character). For example, Judith is a female monster, constantly seen with her tagalong boyfriend Ira while seemingly ignoring everything he does. In one of the more heartfelt scenes, Max yells at Judith for doubting the "magical powers" he claims to have as king. In response, Judith yells at Max: "You have to let me yell at you! And you aren't allowed to yell back!" While, to younger viewers, Judith's hurt will be apparent, the more sly commentary on one-sided relationships and social double standards will be obvious as well as heartbreaking. This becomes more surreal as Max begins to comment on things above his age, such as playing "War" with the Wild Things by encouraging them to throw dirt clods at each other, causing them all to fight and become angry with each other. Like many children's movies of the past few years, namely the masterpieces delivered from Pixar's "Up!" and "Wall-E," the film creates an enjoyable teaching moment for children while keeping the older crowd engrossed in the reality of the characters' relationships and emotions.

Even more endearing is the human cast. Before Max leaves for the land of the Wild Things, the audience gets a glimpse of his home life: a single mom, an adolescent sister who refuses to care, and a faraway dad, the only hint to the father's existence is a globe on Max's desk, engraved with "From Dad to Max: You are the owner of this world." In a precursor to his adventures with the "Wild Things," Max starts a snowball fight with some of his sister's friends, who, in the excitement, smash an igloo Max built and leave him crying. Max runs home and breaks a valentine he gave to his sister, immediately feeling regret and telling his mother. Although Max is only in the "real world" for a short while, the schema is familiar: his mom has a strange new boyfriend, his sister is surrounded by adoring male fans and his neighborhood is lower-middle class at best. However, it builds the emotional stage for the rest of the film, both surrounded in the innocence of childhood and the frustration of living the life of a social being.

Disney had actually acquired the rights to the story in the 1980's, hoping to make the film a mixture of animation and live-action. Losing interest, Disney sold the rights to Universal. The lack of animation and use of mascot-style costumes in the current version is refreshingly old-fashioned, making the monsters seem real and tangible. This, however, is also due to the fantastic voice acting and script. All the voice acting is done by adults, including Forest Whitaker, Paul Dano and the previously mentioned Gandolfini, but absent of the goofball accents or coy punch-lines seen in other star-studded children's movies (here's to you, "Robots"). Just as well, Max, portrayed by the awesomely-named and scarily-talented Max Records, has what many child actors lack: the ability to act like a child.

To put the film to rest, it is a joyful and tearful tribute to the classic book, filled with memorable scenes and a style all its own. Its mixture of low-budget lighting and scenery, covered in the lo-fi soundtrack created by Karen O of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, with the carefully recreated image of the all-too familiar monsters provides an authenticity missing from many adaptations. While the marketing has gotten a little extreme (the to-be-released video game and clothing line are unnecessary and silly), it is obvious the film was handled by those loyal to original work, recognizing the message it sends while adding their own plotlines without forcing them in. Let the wild rumpus begin.

'Lying' is funny, smart

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There is a world where no one can tell a lie. Life is simple and boring. No one questions how the world works. One's status is based on appearance and salary. Religion is unknown. Human frankness and shallowness creates hilarity.

This is the world you'll find in the new comedy "The Invention of Lying," starring Ricky Gervais and Jennifer Garner.

The plot is relatively simple. Mark Bellison (Gervais) is a failing screenwriter who gets fired for failing to turn the black plague into an interesting film treatment. There's no such thing as fiction. All movies come from historical events and Mark gets stuck working with the uninteresting 13th century. He visits his mother living in "A Sad Place Where Old People Come to Die." He goes on a blind date with Anna (Garner) who bluntly tells him that he's short, fat and unsuitable as a mate due to his bad genetics.

Then the unthinkable happens. Mark goes into his bank and says he has \$800 in his account instead of the \$300 he really has. The teller informs him that the computer says he only has \$300 in his account. She hands him eight one hundred dollar bills and apologizes for the error. Mark has told the world's first lie.

Mark is stunned. He can't believe what happened. He can't even describe it because there's no word for "lie." At first his lies are trivial: telling a woman she must have sex with him or the world will end and telling his friends he invented the bicycle. "I love your work," responds a homeless man taking his word for gospel truth.

As the movie progresses so do the implications of the lies. The most poignant scene in the film takes place between Mark and his dying mother. She is scared to death knowing the end is near and that her body will lay lifeless in the ground for eternity. To ease her pain Mark tells her that death is not the end, that when she dies everyone gets a mansion in the sky and everyone she ever loved will be there with her.

"Say hi to dad for me," says Mark through tears. Watch this scene and try to tell yourself that what Mark did is wrong. Word of what he told his mother becomes international news. A makeshift question and answer session is held in his front yard. Mark is forced to

expand on his story of life after death, basically creating religion as he talks. The scene is both controversial and hilarious.

"The Invention of Lying" is both a simple and complex film full of laugh out loud lines and heartfelt moments. The romance between Mark and Anna progresses from impossible to predictable. The fact that we know what is coming doesn't take away from the journey, however. Mark is able to advance his career and salary through lying but not once does he lie to win Anna's heart. Lying is at the heart of the film, but honesty wins out in the end.

Gervais is best known for his role as David Brent on the British version of "The Office" and the movie has no shortages of awkwardly funny moments that made that show so famous. He plays Mark not as a lovable loser but as a man down on his luck who wants nothing more than for Anna to see past his looks and into his soul. Garner

deserves credit for making Anna a character we root for. She at first comes across as shallow, wanting only a husband with flawless looks and great genes. Eventually she learns how to enjoy life with those who make her happy, no matter what they look like. There are also small roles played wonderfully by Rob Lowe, Tina Fey, Edward Norton and Phillip Seymour Hoffman.

"The Invention of Lying" is a comedy that isn't afraid to ask you to use your brain. It will make you laugh and may even challenge your beliefs. It's not the kind of film that screams for attention or begs for your approval. It's the kind of movie that quietly earns your respect.



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