

'The LEGO Ninjago Movie' has visual pop, but a worn storyline

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 100 min.

It's only been three years since the LEGO toy line hit the big screen, but in no time at all it has become a major franchise. The latest feature based around the blocky characters is based on the TV series *LEGO Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu*. As one might have guessed, it finds its inspiration from martial arts movies (with a few nods to giant monster flicks).

The LEGO Ninjago Movie

also follows in the same style as previous entries. It feels a bit familiar and doesn't always hit the mark, but it will certainly entertain children and offer a chuckle here and there for adults.

After a live-action prologue, the bulk of the story takes place in Ninjago City, a metropolis that bears striking resemblance to Hong Kong. There, Master Wu (Jackie Chan) instructs a group of talented teenagers and secret ninjas who protect the community with their impressive martial artist skills. Their arch nemesis is the villainous but goofy Lord Garmadon (Justin Theroux), brother to Master Wu. Adding to the family drama is the fact that Ninjago team member Lloyd (Dave Franco), is Garmadon's estranged son. Not only does that make the protagonist a social pariah at school, but the sinister antagonist can't take a hint and seems completely unaware of his own relation to the main do-gooder.

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As with the others, this is a great-looking movie that has a lot of visual pop. The LEGO block Ninjago City is eye-catching, popping off the screen and looking even more striking when lit up with neon lights in the evening. There are more impressive visuals from the nearby volcano where Garmadon resides and in the various jungle environments, adding a bit of variety in landscapes to what we’ve seen in previous LEGO movies. And of course, the team ships and nasty invading robots look fantastic as well.

As for the jokes, they’re a little more hit-and-miss this time out. This particular film seems geared more towards younger viewers and a great deal of the humor is broader and less incisive. Much of this comes from the supporting characters, who aren’t given as much to work with as the central roles; as the film progresses, some of them fade into the scenery and a couple of the teens are almost interchangeable. Another minor problem is in the finale. There’s a sweet and warm-hearted lesson to be learned at the close, but it feels underwhelming from the point of view of providing excitement and drama.

What does work very well is the father/son dynamic. Their awkward relationship is milked for laughs and offers many of the movie’s best moments. Garmadon can’t figure out how to pronounce Lloyd’s name (there are two “l”s in it, after all) and another highlight includes the villain and protagonist trying to deal with a serious, LEGO-related accident that befalls one of the pair. The screenwriters also get some mileage out of its hero’s outcast status early on. Lloyd knows things are bad when a pop song written about him, “Boo Lloyd!”, rises to the top of the charts and adds insult to injury.

So, while the movie has some slow sections and doesn’t quite nail the final landing, it looks fantastic and there are entertaining moments of levity here and there. It isn’t nearly as strong as *The Lego Movie*

, but one has no doubts that the feature will entertain youngsters (I’d add a half-star to my original rating for the kids) and provide some chuckles here and there for adults.

The LEGO Ninjago Movie

isn’t perfect, but gets a few good kicks in.

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