Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 14 December 2018 10:33





Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 117 minutes

Audiences have certainly gotten a lot of Spider-Man over the past 15 years, including a film franchise, a rebooted franchise and another reconfigured version as part of the Marvel Universe.

Now, Sony brings not one, but numerous incarnations of the superhero into an animated take on the character. Surprisingly, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is better than anticipated, employing unique visuals and plenty of action, while poking fun at tropes associated with the role.

This version follows teenager Miles Morales (Shameik Moore), who lives in a world inhabited by a heroic Spider-Man (Chris Pine). When the lead is also bitten by a radioactive spider, he begins to develop the same incredible abilities. This comes in handy after the sinister Kingpin (Liev Schreiber) opens a dimensional portal and mortally wounds Spider-Man.

As the time-space continuum begins to unravel and pose a threat to all existence, the young Morales finds it difficult to adapt to his new abilities and stop the threat. However, he soon encounters other, very different versions of Spider-man who have arrived from parallel universes.

The group teams up with Morales in the hope of saving the universe and getting back to their alternate realities.

The film has a slightly darker tone than previous versions, likely serving tweens and teens more than younger children.

Its unusual central concept of presenting an alternate universe that gets rid of the more traditional incarnation of Spider-Man early on may come as an initial shock, but it adds a little more variety and unexpectedness to the proceedings. The choice also allows the villain to pose a more significant and dangerous threat to the hero.

What serves the tale best are its various and very flawed Spider-Mans who arrive on the scene.

Morales finds himself being trained by a broken version of his hero; a shabbier, out-of-shape Peter Parker (Jake Johnson) still pining from a break-up with his lady love in his home dimension. It’s actually quite amusing to see an older, depressed version of the altruistic kid attempt to serve as a mentor to a young apprentice. There are a lot of fun interchanges between the pair.

And of course, the other Spider-Mans who unexpectedly arrive add even more laughs. They

include a Gwen Stacy (Hailee Steinfeld) who has taken on the mutant abilities, a brooding neo-noir Spider-Man (Nicholas Cage), Japanese girl (Kimiko Glenn) and her Spider-Man robot, and most enjoyably, a smart-alecky, porcine version of the character known as Spider-Ham (John Mulaney).

This motley crew adds plenty of jokes and lightness to the film.

While viewers have certainly become accustomed to the slick and polished computer generated visuals seen in Pixar films, this title wisely attempts a different look, combining technical flare to create a comic book appearance.

The style also provides plenty of kick during action scenes that feature Morales attempting to swing his way through the city streets.

There’s also an elaborate bit in which the protagonist must escape the clutches of a super-villain through the trees of a heavily wooded area surrounding a laboratory. These moments are impressive and, at times, even exciting.

Admittedly, it isn’t the best animated film of the year. The movie does feel a bit too lengthy for its own good and doesn’t have a stand-out climactic battle that will be remembered after the credits roll, but this is still an entertaining take on the hero. And it also effectively displays how an outcast (or group of outsiders) can succeed against all odds.

In the end, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* makes for a fine addition to the character’s cinematic cannon.

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