

'Wonder Park' may amuse kids, but will leave adults rolling their eyes

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

Running Time: 86 minutes

As animated films go, there are some releases that are made squarely for the youngest of viewers, a smaller number that cater exclusively to adults, and finally those that aspire to bridge the gap, entertaining young and old alike. The latest feature to hit cinemas is *Wonder Park*, about a magical theme park called, oddly enough, Wonderland. For those curious, it most definitely fits into the first animated film delineation. It's certainly polished looking enough to be appealing to young children, but many parents attending with them will be looking at their watches.

June (Brianna Denski) is an imaginative, thrill-seeking child who spends free time with her mom (Jennifer Garner) designing and creating an amusement park with exaggerated attractions and a crew of animal caretakers. When her ill mother is forced to leave home for an extended hospital stay, an upset June removes her designs and takes on a somber and serious approach to life. When June's dad (Matthew Broderick) sends her to math camp, the girl escapes into the woods where she finds the ruins of Wonderland. She also meets her animal pals (voiced by Mila Kunis, John Oliver, Kenan Thompson, Ken Jeong, Ken Hudson Campbell and Norbert Leo Butz), who urge her to reunite them and revitalize the park before it is torn apart by rampaging stuffed animals called Chimpanzombies.

As mentioned, the visuals are skillfully put together and there are some impressive long shots and a zippy energy during a couple of sequences, including a bit with June on a makeshift rollercoaster that careens off its tracks and into the neighborhood and even some nicely animated bits involving the camera following the lead as she moves around and sits on a school

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bus. The park lends itself to some nice imagery, although for the majority of the running time the location is in shambles and overgrown with weeds.

The idea of stuffed animals turning bad and leading a charge against the park is amusing...at least in concept. Unfortunately, the Chimpanzombie antagonists don't have any discernable personality. Of course, that may inform viewers as to why they have been given that moniker, but beyond the initial gag of cute little animals carrying weapons, these bad guys fail to make a lasting impression and there ultimately isn't much of interest about them.

And the heroic animals are simply drawn, from a narcoleptic bear, to a monkey lacking creative inspiration, as well as a nervous porcupine with a crush on his wild boar co-worker. Much of the humor is broad and aimed specifically at children. As an adult, if you were hoping for some subtle or amusing comment on what part of the girl's psyche each unusual character might represent, you won't find any jokes of the sort in this production. The talented voice cast do their best, but most of the time are forced into delivering a series of sweet but straight-forward and obvious gags.

Of course, the point of the movie is to inspire children to never give up on their dreams or stop using their imagination. Unfortunately, this theme is repeatedly stated, as character after character utters to Jane that, "You are the wonder in Wonderland." Once is quite enough for a comment like that, but here it's hammered into viewers as often and about as bluntly as a sledgehammer over the head. Ultimately, kids won't mind and will enjoy seeing a wild and embellished theme park come to life onscreen. But instead of thrills, adults may be rolling their eyes at much of *Wonder Park*.

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