

‘Elemental’ is missing pieces that would elevate it to a higher level

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 23 June 2023 05:17



Rating: <<

out of <<<<<

Running Time:
103 minutes

This animated feature from Pixar and Disney opens exclusively at theaters on Friday, June 16.

For decades, Pixar have been trailblazers in feature animation, wowing audiences with gorgeously rendered movies that also resonate emotionally with viewers. While their recent product has still been largely remarkable, it seems as though other production companies have begun to catch up, presenting equally dazzling and boundary-pushing tales. Pixar's latest is *Elemental*

and it is an impressive-looking film. Unfortunately, the story isn't quite as overwhelming and the finished product doesn't leave a lasting impact.

The story is set in a city where living embodiments of the elements fire, water, earth and air reside. Ember (Leah Lewis) from the fire-based community is the daughter of immigrant shop owner Bernie (Ronnie del Carmen) and his wife Cinder (Shila Ommi). She feels pressure to

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take over the family business and struggles with a temper toward customers.

Problems arise when the lead runs the store for a day and a major water leak is discovered by a city inspector named Wade (Mamoudou Athie). When Ember learns that the infraction could mean the closure of her father's business, she seeks Wade's advice on nullifying the infraction. After hearing her story, the sensitive Water element agrees to help her try to solve the issue and save the store.

Despite their different backgrounds, they begin to develop feelings for each other. But can two opposing elements actually form a relationship?

There's a lot of opportunity for this movie to address and deal with interesting themes. Obviously, Ember's anger and anxiety does force her to deal with a deep desire to please her parents and meet their expectations. Early sections also show that those with a fire element background appear to be treated with scorn or fear by other elements.

The different fire and water backgrounds and literal problems being in close company offers potential conflict and concern about Ember and Wade's future together. And it also seems strange that an aqueduct in such disrepair wouldn't garner more attention from, well, government officials and everyone in town.

Despite all this, the movie is primarily concerned with only the first problem listed. Wade is the nicest and most open character imaginable, not concerning himself with potential relationship difficulties and charming Ember throughout. And truth be told, despite a few comments early on, the family members are all reasonable and well-meaning too.

The two leads' incredible abilities also grant them special powers that help make the issue of a potential flood play out as less threatening than expected. While this approach is well-intentioned and sweet, it doesn't do much for adding conflict or drama to the proceedings. In fact, if it weren't for the exaggerated fire, water, air and earth visuals, the film would be a generic young adult romance.

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Thankfully, the city itself is impressive to behold and the animation is frequently eye-popping. Some shots of floodwater pooling in the store's basement and on city streets look almost photorealistic. The same goes for Wade's beautifully waterlogged family apartment.

And while there is an overreliance on visual puns (with many gags earning groans rather than laughs), there are a couple of amusing bits that do work. The best involves Wade's openly histrionic family presenting him with the gift of a weepy portrait to commemorate an emotional life moment.

It's all wonderful to look at, there are a couple of chuckles and the characters (especially Wade) are very likable. Sadly, they've simply been dropped into a story that is too low-key and lacks dramatic tension or high stakes. The characters appear to adore each other and despite their opposing physical states, there are very few personal challenges for them to face in order to be together. In summation, *Elemental* works reasonably well, but appears to be missing the necessary pieces to elevate it to a higher level.

NOTE: *Carl's Date* is a short that appears before the main feature. It's a sequel of sorts to the 2009 film *Up*, and the plot follows Carl (Edward Asner) as he contemplates going out on a date. The short is also pleasant, but feels like a blunter repeat of the central theme that was so effectively delivered in the original film.

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