



DRAGONS NO MORE?

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How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World has just premiered across theatres in Bangladesh, and as an avid fan of the franchise, I couldn't wait for this much awaited finale to the trilogy. If you haven't watched the first two movies and don't want spoilers, you'd best steer clear of this review, while putting some deep thought into what you're really doing with your life.

In 2010 we were introduced to Hiccup, the lanky Viking ceaselessly striving to prove himself to his father, coincidentally the chief of the Hooligan tribe on their island of Berk. We also met Toothless, a Night Fury dragon, termed "the unholy child of lightning and death itself", who ends up being as divergent from that reputation as it is "dragonly" possible to be. From the moment palm met snout, we could tell theirs was going to be one of those pairs that go down in history as one of the most beloved animated friendships to ever grace our screens.

Together, with the help of Hiccup's rag-tag bunch of friends (who become Dragon Riders themselves), they achieve the mighty task of changing the perspectives of their entire tribe towards the very dragons they were previously at war with.

In 2014 Hiccup and Toothless reappear in the second entry of the trilogy and we stare open-mouthed as Hiccup pulls possibly the biggest "Neville Longbottom" since the legend himself. Berk is seen to have transformed into a haven for dragons and Vikings to reside together.

At the outset, Hiccup is grappling with what his future holds for him as son of the chief, while also trying to find himself in the present. However by the end of the movie, in an unpredictable yet utterly satisfying turn of events, Hiccup takes up his rightful position as Chief of the Hooligan Tribe, while Toothless becomes an Alpha, a king of dragons.

In 2019, director Dean DeBlois is back with the last leg of this remarkable trilogy. I grabbed a ticket to go watch it as soon as I could. Where we've seen endless lists of movies that fail to deliver on successful sequels, DeBlois and his team have managed to pull off a near-perfect ending to this incredible series.

The movie begins with Chief Hiccup and his Dragon Riders conducting a fast-paced rescue mission where we first get introduced to the female Night Fury, later dubbed "Light Fury". Next, as the Riders return with their rescued dragons, we cut to the signature wide angled view of Berk, which by now invokes all the right feelings of nostalgia. The scenes where Toothless acts as an Alpha and exerts his authority are absolute crowd pleasers. However, even before the plot is officially introduced, we can spot that Berk has a problem. This "utopia for dragons" as Hiccup describes it, is grossly overpopulated, and even though all its inhabitants seem to be as happy as ever, there's no denying that they've reached their breaking point.

On top of this, the central conflict involves Grimmel the Grizzly, a shrewd dragon hunter who, being solely responsible for the near extinction of the Night Furies, will not rest until he has captured Toothless. How To Train Your

Dragon avoids the usual trope of "villain -> bigger villain -> army of bigger villains" that a lot of movies that work with creatures tend to fall into. While both Grimmel and Drago, the previous antagonist, are smart, their methods and ideologies are widely different which makes each turn unpredictable.

As Hiccup narrowly avoids Grimmel's clever tricks, he realises that as Berk grows stronger their enemies evolve as well. The only solution to both problems seems to be disappearing off the map along with their dragons, and Hiccup thinks he might just know the perfect place to go. To that avail, he sets off in his search for a rumoured safe haven for dragons and their riders. A land his father called The Hidden World.

The comic relief in this film is as brilliant as ever with Snotlout, and the Twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut, being in peak form. Add a female dragon that our naive Toothless has to impress, assisted by his equally clueless rider, and the hilarity just goes on. In perhaps one of the funniest, most adorable pre-mating scenes ever, we see Toothless following Hiccup's stealthily provided instructions to woo his "girlfriend", and fail miserably, only to succeed with the aid of one of his signature tried and tested tricks.

Although the movie keeps up a constant flow of comical one-liners, the audience still experiences a rollercoaster of emotions. There isn't a lot of character growth left for this movie, but we do get a bonus development arc for Hiccup himself. In a heart-wrenching, tear-inducing climactic scene, we see a reversal of the palm and snout moment, as

Hiccup comes to terms with the hard truths he has been in denial of since the beginning.

From the voice acting to the graphic detailing, everything about this movie was top notch. Yet, I call it near perfect because despite being a die-hard fan of the series, I did notice some negative tidbits which stood out. As an antagonist, intimidating though he may be, we don't get enough of Grimmel. Then there is the fact that not nearly enough effort goes into bringing out more from the characters of Valka or Eret.

Furthermore, I was really hoping for the Light Fury to have more of a role. Toothless may not talk, but his emotions are plain as day, and seem as developed as any human's. Hers did not. Lastly, the ending does suffer from the lack of an epic fight scene even though it is satisfactory and entirely befitting as a proper conclusion to the series.

If you have watched the first two movies, I'd suggest you go watch this one immediately before you get any spoilers that might ruin it. If you haven't watched any of these movies yet, I would suggest to have a quick movie marathon and then watch the third in theatres, because *How to Train Your Dragon* is definitely worth coming out from under that rock. There might even be a welcome twist thrown in there that I totally did not tell you about.

PS. I just discovered that there is an awesome eight season series for this franchise and I was not ready for this.

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