

Movie Review: ‘The Lego Ninjago Movie’

NEW YORK — Third time lucky? Not for the Lego screen franchise, alas.

In following up on 2014’s “The Lego Movie” and “The Lego Batman Movie” from earlier this year, directors Charlie Bean, Paul Fisher and Bob Logan — the latter two also co-writers, along with four others — attempt to blend a children’s feature and an action film. The result, “The Lego Ninjago Movie” (Warner Bros.), is awkward, noisy and tedious, though the boredom is occasionally relieved by the odd flash of wit.

Bookended by live-action sequences featuring martial-arts icon Jackie Chan as a curio shop owner who becomes the story’s narrator, the cartoon follows the exploits of a schoolboy named Lloyd (voice of Dave Franco), a resident of far-off Ninjago City.

With his home town constantly under attack by his villainous father, Garmadon (voice of Justin Theroux), Lloyd is an object of scorn and derision to many of his peers. Yet, unbeknown to them or to Garmadon, Lloyd leads a double life, battling his bad dad in the guise of a ninja warrior.

He’s backed up by a quintet of pals and fellow fighters: Cole (voice of Fred Armisen), Nya (voice of Abbi Jacobson), Jay (voice of Kumail Nanjiani), Kai (voice of Michael Pena) and Zane (voice of Zach Woods). Like Lloyd himself, all of them have trained under the tutelage of Master Wu (voiced by Chan), Lloyd’s wise and virtuous uncle (and Garmadon’s estranged brother).

The forgettable series of explosions and other disturbances that follow from this set-up drown out the script’s listless pursuit of themes like the possibility of personal conversion and the value of family reconciliation. A few of the jokes will likely raise a smile. Garmadon, for instance, insists on pronouncing both the L’s in Lloyd. But the demolition quickly recommences.

The dialogue includes some vague mumbo-jumbo about humans harnessing the power of the elements. Thus one of Lloyd’s comrades can deploy fire, another water,

a third ice and so on. Though this aspect of the picture never amounts to much more than an excuse to include the hummable 1990 hit “The Power” on the soundtrack, it’s not for the easily confused.

The film contains perilous situations, a bit of mild scatological humor and a couple of mature references. The Catholic News Service classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.

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