

'Hotel Transylvania: Transformania' wraps up the monster franchise with familiar fun

By Tracy Brown

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The last thing you see before the title card for "Hotel Transylvania: Transformania" drops at the end of the movie is a character shrugging with a smile as if to say, "It is what it is." It's a pretty good summation of the film itself.

The fourth and final installment of a long-running 3DCG monster franchise, "Transformania" delivers what most viewers would expect from a "Hotel Transylvania" film: frenetic energy, physical comedy and Dracula learning another lesson about acceptance. It is now streaming on Amazon Prime Video.

This time around, the film also has some meta elements that its young intended audience likely will not notice nor care too much about. A story about being ready to pass the torch, "Transformania" sees Genndy Tartakovsky — who directed the first three "Hotel Transylvania" films — hand over directing duties to Derek Drymon and Jennifer Kluska. Tartakovsky, known best for his work in TV animation, co-wrote the screenplay with Amos Vernon and Nunzio Randazzo.

The celebration that kicks off the action this time is Hotel Transylvania's 125th anniversary. Dracula (Brian Hull, replacing franchise staple Adam Sandler), who



Sony Pictures Animation

Dracula (Brian Hull) with Mavis (Selena Gomez) return in Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures Animation's "Hotel Transylvania: Transformania."

watched beloved daughter Mavis (Selena Gomez) grow up within the walls of the establishment, is ready to hand her the reins so he can enjoy retirement with his new love, Ericka (Kathryn Hahn).

Or so he thinks. As much as Dracula believes in Mavis' ability to keep things running, he absolutely does not trust her human disaster husband, Johnny (Andy Samberg), to not muck things up. One thing leads to another and Drac and Johnny essentially switch places — Drac becomes human and Johnny a monster — because, as the old adage goes, you

can't really know someone until you walk a mile in their shoes.

In "Transformania's" case, that mile is stretched into an adventure through the jungles of South America. It's a setup that allows Drac, among other things, to suffer through sunlight in the most extreme ways a human can.

Younger viewers who already have an affinity for the "Hotel Transylvania" film series likely will find enough to keep them entertained in this final installment. The amount of havoc the normally goofy but fairly harmless Johnny can wreak as

a monster is impressive, and there are plenty of easy laughs to be had watching all of the familiar monsters of Drac's pack in their new human forms.

For parents, the enjoyment of "Transformania" might come down to their attitude toward adults who never quite grow up. Johnny, a self-professed slacker, is in heightened form here even compared with previous "Hotel Transylvania" films. Unless you already have a natural liking for the character — or experience the same epiphany Drac has over the course of the movie — Johnny might be a bit much, especially since he's not the one required to show any growth.

That said, one of the "Hotel Transylvania" series' biggest strengths has always been its cartoony style and embrace of a more exaggerated, elastic character animation. While this may not be as innovative now as it was when the first film in the series debuted in 2012, Drymon and Kluska's "Transformania" still packs visual fun.

Another hallmark of "Hotel Transylvania" films is their routine setup — Drac tries to keep a secret from Mavis for one reason or another, then has to dig himself out of trouble. This time, Mavis gets a bigger stake in the action. While much could be said about Mavis having to clean up after her father or her husband, it's nice to see her take an active role in saving the day.

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