



Buzz Lightyear (voiced by Chris Evans) and Alisha Hawthorne (voiced by Uzo Aduba) in the Pixar movie "Lightyear." Pixar

'Lightyear' nimbly blends adult drama, kid adventure

By Katie Walsh
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Disney has made big business mining content from content, with spinoffs and sequels and multiverses dancing through multiplexes and streaming apps.

"Lightyear," the latest Disney/Pixar animated film, has been extracted from the much-beloved "Toy Story" universe, but it's a bit unique. It's sort of a prequel, in that it's intended to be Andy's favorite movie, the one that spawned the Buzz Lightyear toy that took up residence in his room with Woody and the rest of his pals.

So "Lightyear" is not about Buzz Lightyear, the toy, but about Buzz Lightyear, the character, and this satisfying animated sci-fi adventure is a good choice for Andy's favorite flick.

Though Tim Allen originally voiced Buzz, Chris Evans has taken over vocal duties in "Lightyear," and with Evans in the role, there's more than a

few times one will wish this was a live-action film. "Lightyear," directed by Angus MacLane, and written by MacLane, Matthew Aldrich and Jason Headley, does manage to strike an interesting tone between "adult drama" and "kiddie adventure," with a serious sci-fi story that's been dusted with some good humor and the therapy-approved life lessons we've come to expect from Disney movies.

We meet the intrepid Space Ranger Buzz Lightyear on a dangerous mission to a mystery planet with his best friend and fellow Ranger Alisha Hawthorne (Uzo Aduba). When Buzz crashes the ship during a harrowing escape and maroons the team, he feels the guilt that comes with failure, and feels responsible for returning the team back home. He's dedicated to finishing the mission, but as time passes, life happens, even while marooned, but as Buzz stubbornly refuses to accept their new reality, life

passes him by.

Life passing is a bit more extreme for Buzz in this situation: Every time he tries to achieve hyper-speed during his test flights, years pass on the planet though it's only minutes to him. His friends start families and grow older, while he's stewing over fuel crystals with his disarming and loyal robot cat, Sox (Peter Sohn). Stuck on his own solo heroics, Buzz has missed the boat on time, and the life that comes with it.

At the film's core is a message about learning to ask for help, and the importance of working as a team rather than as an individual, as well as a reminder to slow down and think about the cost of rushing ahead as planned. These lessons aren't exactly subtle, pitched at a child's understanding of the film's morals, though the story itself is more mature and dramatic.

"Lightyear" pulls from clas-

sic sci-fi adventure tropes, and Buzz is cut from the same cloth as another summer action hero, Maverick, in "Top Gun: Maverick." Both are solitary heroes who feel they alone can achieve a mission, but learn they need to rely on others in order to get the job done. The parallels are so stark, in fact, that one has to chuckle at some of the coincidental (or not?) parallels.

The film also touches on the multiverse trend that's so hot right now, and while the logic of time travel and multiple selves doesn't exactly track here, it's

the character logic that does.

"Lightyear" does get mired in a gray area between genres, and doesn't necessarily soar like some of the other films that it references. The humor is muted and it lacks the heartstring-tugging of the "Toy Story" movies from whose forehead it's apparently sprung, fully formed.

Nevertheless, "Lightyear" is more charming than it's not, and has a potential breakout star in Sox. Just like the Buzz in "Toy Story," the Buzz in "Lightyear" has a big, beating heart underneath that Space Ranger suit.

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