

Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs

📺 Columbia Pictures/Sony Pictures Animation | Starring Bill Hader, Mr. T, James Caan, Neil Patrick Harris, Benjamin Bratt, Anna Faris | Rated PG

Movies about the weather and food usually don't go together, so I didn't exactly have big expectations—or a craving, for that matter—for *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs*.

Inspired by—although reportedly only “very loosely” based on—Judi Barrett's 1978 children's book, the animated film focuses on a town where food, “manna from heaven,” falls from the sky like rain.

Flint Lockwood (Bill Hader) is an eccentric young scientist whose awkward ways and wacky inventions—spray-on shoes, “ratbirds” and a monkey-thought translator—has turned him into an ostracized geek in his hometown of Swallow Falls.

“Everybody thinks I'm a weirdo,” Flint tells his mom. To which she responds: “The world needs your originality and you're going to grow into it.”

Sure enough, Flint's fortune changes with his latest contraption, a miraculous food-making machine. Echoing *Back to the Future's* Dr. Emmett Brown, Flint exclaims that he finally created something that works, which brings happiness to everyone in town—except his father, Tim (James Caan), who can't relate to his quirky son and prefers that he be his right-hand man at his bait and tackle shop.

Meanwhile, cute but equally nerdy TV intern Sam Sparks (Anna Faris) gets her big break by reporting the story on Flint's invention, which could solve world hunger. Soon, Flint plans a smorgasbord as he's inundated with requests from the

townspeople, including an ice cream snowstorm for the son of Mr. T—who plays the hilarious, by-the-rules town policeman Earl Devereaux.

Next, the Mayor Shelbourne (Bruce Campbell) changes the name of the town to Chew and Swallow, with gluttonous designs to turn the island village into a worldwide cruise ship destination. However, when Flint's machine develops a mind of its own and "the over-mutating food" threatens Chew and Swallow, he must save the world—if he can destroy his own creation.

Rated PG, the movie is surprisingly clean with no potty words or double entendres, and Flint's relationship with Sam is innocently played up for laughs. *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* could be described as TV's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* meets *Twister*—without the scary stuff.

In fact, the trailers for Disney's *A Christmas Carol* and *Alice in Wonderland* were the only times I had to be concerned about the eyes and ears of my three young boys (Alex, Andrew and Chase) during the 3-D screening.

Speaking of 3-D, the creative animation of the raining food—from giant meatballs and boats made of sandwiches to a Jell-O castle and a spaghetti tornado—will surely wow parents and youngsters alike.

Fast-paced and funny, the movie subtly conveys the serious message of not tampering with God's creation. But my favorite part in this unique film is the back-story of Flint's desire to win his dad's love and approval. With the birth this week of our fourth boy, Colton Nathaniel, I'm reminded of the Bible's admonition to nurture a loving relationship with my children.

Following on the heels of such CGI hits this year such as *Up*, *Ice Age: The Meltdown* and *Monsters vs. Aliens*, *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* will likely cause moviegoers to want a

second helping of the film, touted as “the most delicious event since macaroni met cheese.” Bon appétit.

Content Watch: With a running time of 102 minutes, Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs is rated PG for brief mild language and should be suitable for most young children.