

'Rise of the Guardians'—Not Naughty, Very Nice

You better watch out. You better not cry. Better not pout. I'm telling you why. A reimagined Santa Claus and his friends are coming to town.

Just in time for the holidays, *Rise of the Guardians* unites the most famous fictional characters of childhood—Santa Claus (voiced by Alec Baldwin), the Easter Bunny (Hugh Jackman) and the Tooth Fairy (Isla Fisher)—on a wild adventure along with Jack Frost (Chris Pine) as the new guy in the group.

Loosely adapted from William Joyce's book series "The Guardians of Childhood," as well as from Joyce's short film *The Man in the Moon*, the animated film from DreamWorks Animation tells the story of a band of unlikely heroes—each with extraordinary abilities.

Jack Frost has a carefree life with no responsibilities in all the world. Wherever Jack goes, he brings winter, which means snow days—bringing happiness and joy to all boys and girls. But when the Nightmare King, Pitch (Jude Law) returns in an all-out assault to take over the innocent hopes, dreams and imagination of every child, he brings darkness and fear to all—while destroying their joy and faith in good.

Only a beefy, tattooed Santa Claus, a boomerang-wielding Bunny with an attitude, the ever-loving and gentle Tooth Fairy and the peaceful Sandman stand in Pitch's way. They must recruit Jack's help to defeat the Boogeyman or it's curtains for all.

"It is our job to protect the children of the world," Santa declares. "For as long as they believe in us, we will guard them with our lives."

Sounds like the premise for the latest superhero flick, right?

After all, Baldwin called the Guardians “the Justice League of childhood,” and Fisher referred to them as the “animated Avengers” during a presentation at the Cannes International Film Festival.

The movie, though, is much more than the typical action Hollywood blockbuster. It’s laced throughout with spiritual themes and aspects that it could have been titled *Rise of the Guardian Angels*.

“With an array of powerful Christian themes and moral lessons in its fabric, *Guardians* will appeal to moms, dads, children and seniors within the large ‘faith and family’ audience looking for hopeful, life-affirming holiday entertainment,” said a news release from DreamWorks Animation’s Faith and Family outreach.

“Though lighthearted and exciting, the film also concerns the serious subjects of prayer, purity, guardian angels and spiritual warfare, which ultimately gets to the true meaning of life itself,” the release continued. “While kids will embrace the film for its pure entertainment value, parents, grandparents, teachers and ministry leaders will connect on a deeper level with the film’s transcendent messages.”

Indeed, evil is truly evil and good is truly good in the movie. Pitch is portrayed as a deceiver, tempting Jack much like Satan tries to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. Jack Frost, though mischievous, is not a bad guy as depicted in recent films. Santa isn’t just some jolly fat guy who gives gifts to good children. North, as he’s called, is a warrior who loves and has a duty to protect all children—naughty or nice. *Guardians* depicts unconditional love as a reason to go to battle. In other words, it is all right to fight and be fierce to protect that which is good.

Director Peter Ramsey and screenwriter David Lindsay-Abaire should also be applauded for keeping the movie squeaky clean.

That's significant, considering DreamWorks Animation's is known for using plenty of risqué double entendres in movies such as *Shrek* and *Kung Fu Panda*.

Guardians, though, also features some fuzzy spiritual elements that Christian parents should take note of. For starters, there is no reference to God, but the being responsible for the Guardians could be viewed as an allegory for an omnipresent God. The notion that He has a destiny for all has scriptural roots. Additionally, Christian families who experience art in a literal way may be offended by the pagan worship of the elements. However, those who value symbolism will find many positive themes to use in family discussions.

Overall, *Guardians* is a movie that you can bring your whole family to—from your youngest to grandma—because it's clean, fun and awesome. There is something for everyone. It's just that good, not to mention a wellspring for spiritual discussions!

Content Watch: Rated PG for thematic elements and some mildly scary action, *Rise of the Guardians* clearly lays out the difference between good and evil. It's best to exercise caution in letting small children watch the movie in light of Pitch's frightening dark horses and weird nightmare images.