

How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World (2019)



Astrid & Hiccup in their workshop with Toothless.
(c) Universal

Writer-director Dean DeBlois continues his masterly transference to the screen of author Cressida Cowell's wonderful universe of Vikings and fire-breathing dragons in this, the last of DreamWorks Animation's trilogy. In this brilliant series we are privileged to witness the central character Hiccup (voiced by Jay Baruchel) grow from a clumsy adolescent to a battle tested but still unsure leader to a dynamic liberator who discovers love, both of the romantic and of the altruistic kinds. Standing firmly by his side and instilling self-confidence in him is the warrior/maiden Astrid (America Ferrera).

In each of the films Hiccup suffers loss. In the first it was his mother and then a foot in battle. In the second it is his father Stoick (Gerard Butler). This time it will be his beloved island of Berk and then his constant companion, the dragon Toothless, which he will not so much as "lose," but give up or let go. One poignant scene is a flashback to Hiccup's father [Stoick](#), who says, "With love comes loss, son; it's part of the deal."

Over almost a decade (the first film was released in 2010) we see Hiccup struggle against his father, then reconcile with him in the middle film, and emerge as a mature leader and

family man by the conclusion of the third film. We also see a terrific advancement in CG animation through these years, the animation of this film so beautiful and fluid that it fills one with wonder.

The film opens with our band of heroes clad in fire-resistant dragon-scale armor rescuing from trappers a bunch of captive dragons and bringing them back to Berk. By now Hiccup and Astrid have won over all the villagers to their view that humans and dragons can live together in peace. The Hebrew prophet/poet would approve highly of the new society on Berk. Indeed, most of the Vikings have become dragon riders themselves, as well as supporters of Hiccup's campaign to rescue dragons captured by hunters. The village has become so filled with rescued dragons that one of the especially gigantic newcomers causes the collapse of a row of houses and towers when its wings crash into them.

However, there's a new villain afoot. The dragon-hating Grimmel the Grisly (F. Murray Abraham in full villain mode) has amassed a huge fleet of ships on a voyage to destroy the dragons—and he has trained many large ones to fight on his side. There will be plenty of conflict in the air, on the ships, and on the land. Also, an epic trek, once Hiccup decides that he can safeguard the security of the dragons only by journeying to “the hidden world” that mariners claim exists beneath the sea at the edge of the world.

Along with conflict, there are also two love stories. First between the Night Fury dragon Toothless and an alabaster female of the same species, dubbed a Light Fury by Astrid. At first Toothless is more interested in her, but he is clueless as to how to court a female, being what was thought to be the last of his species. One of the most delightful scenes in the film is Hiccup observing from the tree line the pair facing each on a beach. Silently Hiccup signals with his hands what his friend should do, and so Toothless, looking toward his human friend, is coached through the moves of a mating dance.

None of the animals talk in the series, the dragons depicted as intelligent, but not on the same level as humans.

The second love story, of course, is that of Hiccup's and Astrid's. Both had rejected a suggestion early in the film that they marry—something that Stoick had wished for in the second film. Astrid bucks up Hiccup at the low point in the film when it looks like he has failed in his struggle against Grimmel. She comforts, inspires, trades jokes with, and fights alongside him as an equal, so how could they possibly not fall for each other?

Viewers, young and old, will enjoy the humor, provided mainly by Hiccup's friends. There is Snotlout (Jonah Hill), a bungling braggart out to impress Valka (Cate Blanchett), a Dragon Rider who turned up in the middle film as Hiccup's long-lost mother. There are the not so bright twins Ruffnut (Kristen Wiig) and Tuffnut (Justin Ruppel), so inept in battle that are often a hazard. There is also Gobber (Craig Ferguson), whom we learned earlier is gay, though nothing is made of it in this film. However, Hiccup's prosthetic foot does become an issue—at first for a bit of humor and later a key factor in our hero's struggle with the villain.

The ending will lead either to tears or a lump in the throat when Hiccup realizes that loving someone means allowing them the freedom to grow and go in his or her own way. His short monologue about needing to look at things not from one's own point of view but from what is best from the other's perspective indicates that he has grown into the wisdom that will make him a great chief. This is a great ending for a series of films that, despite being set in a violent age, and thus includes a lot of sword fighting, can be a fine tool to explore peacemaking with children.

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