

How to Train Your Dragon 2 (2014)

Rated PG. Running time: 1 hour 42 min.

Our content ratings (0-10): Violence 4; Language 0; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (0-5): 4

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

Isaiah 11:6

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:9

Our Viking hero Hiccup (voiced by Jay Baruchel) is no child, but as we see in this sequel, he does want to lead wolves and lambs to lie down together, or in his case, dragons and men. I loved the first film in which the villain was not a person, but the false perception about each other that Hiccup's people and dragons clung to, his mission becoming one of bringing about understanding and reconciliation. This time there is a human villain in Drago Bludvist (voiced by Djimon Hounsou—more on him later), but Hiccup still sees himself as a peacemaker, telling his warrior father Stoick (Gerard Butler) that he would try to talk with and convince their enemy that war is not the way to deal with problems.

The film begins 5 years after the first, dragons and humans now cooperating with each other. There is a delightful juxtaposition of two scenes, one in which Hiccup is alone

riding his beloved dragon Toothless amidst the clouds, and the other involving his friends playing a spectacular game astride dragons that resembles Quiddich in which the Snitch is replaced by specially marked sheep that are caught and tossed about as if they were balls. Fortunately this is an animated film, else the S.P.C.A. would have protested. While Astrid (America Ferrara) is winning the game, Hiccup escapes his father's persistent call to take up tribal leadership responsibilities by exploring uncharted lands beyond Berk, adding the details to his folded map that he carries aloft with him. The 3-D enhanced animation is thrilling as he and Toothless enjoy soaring through the clouds and flying amidst towering mountains. Later Astrid joins her now best friend in his explorations.

They come across Eret (Kit Harington), a dragon trapper who is gathering dragons aboard his ship to become a part of the army of Drago Bludvist. He still regards dragons as dangerous enemies that have to be conquered, not as intelligent creatures with which one cooperates. He decides to lead his armada of huge ships loaded with dragons and warriors to subjugate Berk. Hiccup also discovers a cave and a valley full of dragons where a strange Dragon Rider reigns. He is astounded to learn that the warrior is a woman named Valka (Cate Blanchett), and more so when she turns out to be the mother that his father had told him had died. It seems that she had left because of his stubborn opposition to her desire to befriend rather than to kill dragons. The scene in which at last Stoick and Valka reconcile is a beautiful one greatly enhanced by the tuneful Celtic ballad "For the Dancing and the Dreaming" that he begins, and then Valka joins in as they express their love in dance. (This is a song we should be hearing at Oscar time!)

This sequel is to the original what *The Empire Strikes Back* was to the original *Star wars* film, not churned out just to make money, but created as a work of art itself. Dean DeBlois

(both writer and director and another of Canada's gift to movie lovers) is to be commended for this marvelously crafted film. Again I urge adults to watch this alongside children for entertainment that also inspires. Fair warning—the film does not dodge the fact that death is real and can unexpectedly take away someone we love. Children of a long ago generation learned this from *Bambi*, just as today's children will—thus this cautionary note to parents of children younger than primary age. Be prepared for some questions about mortality and death that the film might raise.

The review with a set of reflection/discussion questions will be in the July issue of Visual Parables.