



CARTOON SALOON AT 25

My Father's Dragon

My Father's Dragon

Directed by: Nora Twomey

©: Netflix

A Mockingbird Pictures, Cartoon Saloon production

Presented by: Netflix

Executive Producers: Meg LeFauve, John Morgan, Tomm Moore, Gerry Shirren, Ruth Coady, Alan Moloney

Produced by: Bonnie Curtis, Julie Lynn, Paul Young

Line Producer: Zahra Dowlatabadi

Casting: Amy Lippens

Written by: Meg LeFauve

Based on the story by: Meg LeFauve, John Morgan

Inspired by the children's book by:

Ruth Stiles Gannett

Head of Story: Giovanna Ferrari

Visual Effects Designer: Narissa Schander

Animation Director: Giovanna Ferrari

Animation Supervisors: Andrzej Radka, Svend Andreas Rothmann Bonde

Layout Supervisors: Léo Weiss, Antonio Yordanova Gancheva

Background Supervisor:

Eduardo de Lima Damasceno

Editing by: Richie Cody, Darren Holmes

Production Designer: Rosa Ballester-Cabo

Art Director: Áine McGuinness

Character Design & Model Sheets Supervisor:

Sandra Norup Anderson

Music by: The Danna Brothers

Re-recording Mixers: Justin M. Davey, Zach Seivers

Supervising Sound Editors: Justin M. Davey, Zach Seivers

Voice Cast:

Jacob Tremblay (*Elmer*)

Gaten Matarazzo (*Boris*)

Golshifteh Farahani (*mom*)

Dianne Wiest (*Iris*)

Rita Moreno (*Mrs McClaren*)

Chris O'Dowd (*Kwan*)

Judy Greer (*Soda*)

Alan Cumming (*Cornelius*)

Yara Shahidi (*Callie*)

Jackie Earle Haley (*Tamir*)

Mary Kay Place (*narrator*)

Leighton Meester (*Sasha*)

Spence Moore II (*George*)

Adam Brody (*Bob*)

Charlyne Yi (*Magda*)

Jack S.A. Smith (*Eugene*)

Maggie Lincoln (*Gertie*)

Whoopi Goldberg (*cat*)

Ian McShane (*Saiwa*)

USA-Ireland 2022©

99 mins

Digital

Ever since the surprise Best Animated Feature Oscar nomination for their debut film, *The Secret of Kells* (2009), Irish studio Cartoon Saloon has enjoyed a blossoming international reputation among festival programmers, award voters and animation-hungry audiences alike. But *Kells'* two co-directors have walked distinct creative paths since their first success. Tomm Moore has delved deeper into Irish mythology with *Song of the Sea* (2014) and *Wolfwalkers* (2020), while Nora Twomey has looked further afield for inspiration: to Taliban-era Afghanistan for *The Breadwinner* (2017), and now to the US for *My Father's Dragon*.

It is also, notably, the studio's first feature collaboration with Netflix, which might go some way to explaining some of its more pronounced shifts from what has come before.

Loosely adapted from Ruth Stiles Gannett's 1948 novel by Meg LeFauve, who also scripted Pixar's *Inside Out* (2015) and its forthcoming sequel, the film sports a cast of Hollywood-grade voice talent, led by Jacob Tremblay (*Room*, 2015; *Doctor Sleep*, 2019) as our hero Elmer, and Gaten Matarazzo (*Stranger Things*, 2016-) as Boris, the cuddly, green-and-yellow-striped young dragon Elmer befriends and helps escape from the perilous Wild Island.

Unlike the formal innovations of *Wolfwalkers*, which contrasted sharp-edged designs for its British colonial characters with free-flowing pencil-sketch linework for the Celtic upstarts, *My Father's Dragon* adopts a clean, colourful storybook approach that befits its skew towards younger audiences. But the film isn't unsophisticated: for every armpit fart joke demanded by its buddy-movie stylings, there are shades of complexity one would struggle to find in major studio animated fare. The design of the film's ostensible antagonists – the creatures of Wild Island who have imprisoned Boris – strikes an intriguing balance between charming and chilling. These creatures also have concerns of their own, something best expressed in a nerve-rattling scene featuring a snap-happy crocodile (voiced by Alan Cumming), who juggles terrorising Elmer with caring for several tiny hatchlings, all vying for his attention. A working parent, even in this fantasy land.

Responsibility is the theme, and the film takes care to give weight to its tweenage protagonist's plight. Elmer is eager to be an adult, but has some way to go. His growing confidence in himself and the world around him gives him the false burden of having to solve everyone's problems, from his mother's financial woes to Boris's anxieties about growing into a mature 'after-dragon'. *My Father's Dragon* directly addresses that impulse, and attempts to reassure its viewers, young and old, that it's OK to not have all the answers.

Michael Leader, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

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