

## Empire Review of “Onwards” by Pixar

5 stars out of 5

Elf brothers Ian and Barley Lightfoot — the former ([Holland](#), here every bit the pointy-eared Peter Parker) a gawky high school inbetweener racked with adolescent anxiety, and the latter ([Pratt](#), in Star Lord-meets-Jack Black mode) a loud, brash, fantasy-loving slacker with a penchant for prog rock and a pegasus-painted van named Guinevere. They’re complete opposites, Ian desperate to fit in with his classmates and Barley longing for the world to reconnect with its long-forgotten magic. Neither brother really remembers their father, who died before Ian was born and when Barley was young — but the pair are offered the possibility of a brief reunion with him thanks to a magic staff and crystal that will grant them one full day together.

Of course, the spell doesn’t quite go as planned, leaving the brothers with an all-new problem and only 24 hours to re-attempt it, lest they never get to see their dad again. Cue a thoroughly modern mythical mission to bag a ritual-dependent MacGuffin, a crowd-pleasing odd-couple buddy comedy. If the beats are familiar, it’s a strong framework for some of Pixar’s most elegant storytelling of recent years — the occasionally clanking narrative gears of [Toy Story 4](#) and even [Coco](#) replaced with a satisfying hum of adventure plotting, emotional arcs and comedy that all remain perfectly in sync. It’s pacier and more energetic than its near-two-hour runtime suggests, dovetailing into a wholly satisfying, beautifully handled finale that puts everything in its right place.

It’s also one of Pixar’s outright funniest films — once the second act kicks in, the exact nature of Ian and Barley’s failed spell delivers a string of giddy sight gags, a none-more-Pixar combination of the slapstick and the surreal. Add in the easy charm and charismatic riffing of Holland and Pratt, with top-tier visual comedy right through to the curse-battling climax, and it might be the studio’s wittiest movie since [Monsters, Inc.](#) or [The Incredibles](#). For all the lightness, it’s remarkably tender, too — pausing to take in the quiet power of one foot gently touching another, or pulling off a bizarre dance scene that starts silly and ends up sweetly poignant. Even the ‘death’ of an inanimate object in the second half has an unexpected pathos underneath the humour.

The result is a ripping yarn, heartfelt and wholly entertaining as it zips from frenetic, fairy-fighting freeway chase, to a tomb-raiding set-piece that pays tribute to [Indiana Jones](#). And it’s not just the boys who get to go questing — their mother

Laurel (**Louis-Dreyfus**) teaming up with **Octavia Spencer**'s formerly ferocious Manticore (a lion-scorpion-bat creature who has since settled down to run a family restaurant) as she tries to track down her sons, going full sword-swinging action hero in the final reel.

Pixar's take on the tale-as-old-as-time fantasy genre is, in many ways, traditional — a magic-fuelled (deceased) father-and-son story that eventually becomes a tribute to brotherly love. While it doesn't break new ground for the studio, it's a joyous reminder of just how brilliant Pixar is when working at full capacity. Like the greatest heroes of legends past, *Onward* is pure of heart, stalwart, and true.

