HOME

By Cary Bickley

**Director:** [Tim Johnson](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0426333/?ref_=tt_ov_dr)

**Writers:** [Tom J. Astle](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0040022/?ref_=tt_ov_wr), Matt Ember

Based on Book “The True Meaning of Smekday” by Adam Rex

**Stars:** [Jim Parsons](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1433588/?ref_=tt_ov_st), [Rihanna](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1982597/?ref_=tt_ov_st), [Steve Martin](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000188/?ref_=tt_ov_st), Jennifer Lopez

*Home* the new animated alien adventure movie by Dreamworks has just landed in theatres and I took my son for the amazing ride. Directed by Tim Johnson and starring Jim Parsons, Rihanna, Steve Martin and Jennifer Lopez, Home is the story of an alien “Oh” on the run from his own species (the Boov) who joins forces with a young girl “Tip” who’s been separated from her mother. Together they go on an epic adventure.

Beautifully animated with great performances by Jim Parsons and Rhinna, the movie was both funny and touching. It’s a classic buddy movie in the sense that these two wildly different characters, from literally different worlds have to work together to survive and in so doing they become friends. The humor in their journey is everywhere like when poor Oh just can’t stop himself from dancing to a beat. But it’s also touching, Tip’s quest to reunite with her mother (Jennifer Lopez) is poignant and I cried some actual tears when they found each other.

My son Joey, a seasoned critic at age nine, gave it five out of five stars and was extremely excited when I told him I was going to talk to the writers. Tom Astle and Matt Ember wrote the script based on the novel titled “The True Meaning of Smekday” by Adam Rex.

As Matt and Tom recount how they became involved in Home, they told me it all started with the Director Tim Johnson. Sometime around 2007 Tim read the book by Rex to his young boys and loved it. He got Dreamworks to option it and then Matt and Tom, whose credits include Get Smart, Failure to Launch and Epic, came aboard shortly thereafter.

Me: So how much did you depart from the original book?

Matt: It was a relatively unknown book, but it did have fans and a small following. We focused on two big changes. The book all took place in the US we made it the whole world. – global. Secondly, Tim really wanted to see Oh’s point of view. We see a lot of alien movies where they are the enemy, but we rarely see it from the alien point of view.

Tom: When you think of a movie as a big jigsaw puzzle, the plot is how the pieces of fit together. The story is the picture the puzzle makes when it’s all done. We think we used some different puzzle pieces (than the book) but we’re telling the same story. A young girl and an alien on the run learning about each other’s cultural prejudices and points of view.

Me: I understand you’re both parents, did that play a role in your conception of the movie?

Matt: The fact that we are parents informs everything we do. We’re both fans of the old Warner Brothers cartoons and they were great because they gave something for parents to laugh at and something for kids too. We’re writing for kids but we don’t want parents to blow their brains out either.

Me: What do you consider the essential theme of the movie?

Tom: We worked so closely with Tim Johnson as we developed this, and he really led us. But there are several themes that interlace, including what it means to belong or be included…

Matt: Cultural imperialism….

Tom: And two people learning to be friends and trust each other. The scene where the car is out over the ocean and Tip is sitting there. That scene is a real distillation of the bigger themes of the movie. They are each trying to imagine what the other’s life is like.

Me: I know you’ve done live action movies is this your first animated film?

Matt: We worked on Epic, but this was our first time going from book to release in an animated movie.

Tom: One thing that is cool about an animated movie and this one particularly, is how much thought goes into the look of the movie. We’re used to focusing on character and story. Very early on a conceptual artist, Takao Noeuchi, a character designer, proposed a geometry for the movie. What he proposed was the human world is essentially rectangles, the Boov (aliens) are essentially circles, bubbles, round ship and the Gore (the enemy) are triangles. These conceptual shapes and influences were very eye opening to us.

Me: Critics have really responded to the casting and performances of Jim Parsons and Rhianna. Any inside scoop on that?

Matt: Tim wanted Jim Parsons early on. And he came aboard after two years. When we created Tip we all wanted an Afro Caribbean American so that an immigrant tale was part of her back story, like Oh’s. Rhianna’s name came up because she’s from Barbados, but we didn’t know if she even had any interest in this kind of thing… All of a sudden she’s in.

Tom: When actors come in to do animation they are frequently alone. Not with other performers. There is no set etc. But in this movie they made sure on a few occasions that Rhianna and Jim got to meet and they got along really well. They are from two different worlds in the entertainment industry and the characters are from two different worlds literally… so it kind of worked. A good director makes them feel safe and comfortable in that environment and I think Tim’s good at that.

Me: Anything else?

Tom: I grew up memorizing Steve Martin’s comedy albums and so getting to work with Steve… that was a bucket list thing.

(Note: Steve Martin plays the wildly incompetent leader of the Boov)

Matt: And Jennifer Lopez!

Tom: And Jennifer Lopez, of course.

At this point in the interview my son found us.

Joey: Did you guys write Home? It was really good. I liked how the aliens turned colors. Like when Oh lied he turned green.

Tom: Now there’s a parent’s fantasy! Kids turning green when they lie.

Matt: That would be helpful.

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Home has already grossed over 52 million and is the number one movie at the box office, wildly out performing even Cinderella. It’s appropriate for kids of all ages, and not too scary for the littlest movie goers. Enjoy the Boov!