

K. Austyn Mann

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Ice Age: A Modern Movie with Timeless Tropes

In the spring of 2002, 20th Century Fox would release the first of what would become a quintology of beloved movies: *Ice Age*. The story follows a saber-tooth tiger, a sloth, and a woolly mammoth on their journey to return a human baby back to its tribe. The plot is simple and charming enough for it to captivate the attention of children, but hidden beneath John Leguizamo's stellar voice acting, adults and scholars can recognize themes and tropes that date back before the little ice age. The movie *Ice Age* shares similarities with *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, ancient depictions of trickster figures, and Arthurian legends.

The relationship development that Diego, a saber tooth tiger, has with Sid, a sloth, and Manny, a mammoth, is similar to Enkidu and Gilgamesh in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Diego lives in a separate circle from Manny and Sid. Diego lives and hunts with his pack while Manny and Sid are loners, like the differences in Gilgamesh and Enkidu's backgrounds. The three become rivals for possession for the human baby, Junior. Diego wants the baby to bring it back to his pack as revenge against the father, who "wiped out half [their]" pack", and Manny and Sid want to return the baby to the humans. While Gilgamesh and Enkidu are not competing for possession of something, Enkidu was created to challenge Gilgamesh. Diego offers to serve as a guide to find the humans since he is a superior tracker, much like what Enkidu offers when Gilgamesh wants to slay Humbaba and take control of the Cedar Forest. Diego plans to lead Manny and Sid to his pack where he will betray them, but as the long journey continues, Diego finds friendship

in the two loners and becomes more loyal to them. Near the end of the movie, Diego stands with his new friends and fights his old pack. In the fight, Diego appears to be mortally wounded and he bids a final farewell to Manny, Sid, and Junior. This moment in the movie shows just how much the relationship developed between the three, and a similar event occurs when the gods kill Enkidu as punishment for slaughtering the Bull of Heaven. Gilgamesh is so distraught by the loss that he sets out to find a way to revive him. What started out as a rivalry in both stories grows into an unlikely brotherhood. Although, *Ice Age* has a happier ending, as it turns out Diego is not actually dead.

Diego also serves as a trickster figure. When his pack attacks the human camp, he's the one who slinks around the edges to find the tent where the baby is sheltered while the other tigers fight the humans, which preemptively establishes that he is more cunning. This is even indicated by the other tigers appearing more physically powerful than Diego, especially Soto, the leader of the pack. A main plot point in the story is that Diego tricks Manny and Sid to help him deliver the baby to his pack. He manipulates them by telling them that unless they give the baby to him, they won't be able to track the humans fast enough to find them before heavy snow makes it impossible to get to them. Diego knows he's not strong enough to take on a mammoth to take the baby by force. He even remarks that it would take "the whole pack to bring this mammoth down", and so he uses Manny's size to his benefit. Diego never has to carry Junior and traveling with Manny is safer since other animals are less likely to bother a six-ton mammoth. Finally, at the climax of the movie, when Diego takes a stand with Manny and Sid, it is Diego's idea to give Sid a decoy of Junior made from snow to lead half of the tigers away. Diego literally becomes a champion of the little guy, with the little guy being Junior.

Running tangential to the main plot is the trials and tribulations of Scrat, a saber-toothed squirrel. His one and only goal is to obtain an acorn and successfully bury it to store it for the coming winter. Scrat's quest is very much like the Arthurian legend of the Holy Grail. In a general sense, a holy grail is something incredibly rare and incredibly valuable "in that field" (Mantyk). *The Holy Grail* is said to have been the cup used at the Last Supper. King Arthur's knights of the round table are warned that obtaining the Grail will be no easy task and that only those who are pure will even be able to obtain it. While there is no direct reference to a divine power in *Ice Age*, the results of Scrat trying to bury the acorn could be interpreted as divine rejection by the acorn. Scrat causes the collision of two enormous icebergs which then leads to an avalanche, gets struck by lightning, and causes a volcano to erupt. Much like Sir Lancelot, it appears that Scrat may not be worthy or pure enough to obtain his Holy Grail.

With this analysis, *Ice Age* has become even more of a masterpiece than it was before. These stories and themes have existed for hundreds of years, and it's because of movies like *Ice Age*, which draw on inspiration from these old myths that they persist. Whether you believe in the myths or not, they are amazing stories and combining them in different ways and tweaking them to fit characters is what will keep them relevant for hundreds of years to come. *Ice Age* is only one of the many examples of how ancient literature continually influences modern culture and entertainment.

Work Cited

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