

There Goes the Neighborhood: "The Watch" and "Step Up Revolution"

Written by Mike Schulz
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THE WATCH

A buddy and I caught a Friday-morning screening of *The Watch* along with roughly a dozen others, and before the end credits rolled, only four of us were still in the auditorium. Professional obligations were keeping me at director Akiva Schaffer's comedy and I was my friend's ride, but for the life of me, I can't fathom what prevented those other two patrons from bolting. Lethargy? Politeness? Morbid curiosity?

This tale of a suburban neighborhood-watch foursome and the murderous aliens in their midst is so stupefyingly unfunny that it almost seems a practical joke perpetrated by screenwriters Jared Stern, Seth Rogen, and Evan Goldberg, the latter two of whom famously wrote a draft of their 2007 hit *Superbad* when they were 15. *The Watch* actually resembles something Rogen and Goldberg conceived, and completed, five years before that; childishy inept, pointlessly vulgar, and devoid of nearly all narrative coherence and sense, it's the sort of preposterously bad movie in which the only honest sound heard is that of your jaw hitting the floor. Boasting an unseemly obsession with witless scatological humor – as if the mere repetition of “dick,” “balls,” and “cum” would make the uttering of those words hilarious – yet never worse than when indulging in maudlin sentiment, the film continually humiliates leads Ben Stiller, Vince Vaughn, Jonah Hill, and Richard Ayoade, each of whose desperate, obvious ad libs provide only occasional moments of levity. (Early on, Vaughn has a nice bit when feigning amazement at a set of Russian nesting dolls.) When all is said and done, the only performer not thoroughly degraded by *The Watch's* relentless idiocy is Billy Crudup, whose readings as a potentially otherworldly creep are intensely witty, and who,

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like several of my fellow moviegoers, exited the picture long before it finished. Such a smart guy, that Billy.



STEP UP REVOLUTION

The *Step Up* movies seem to me the hip-hop equivalents of the *Ice Age* movies: We're now four entries into both series, and I don't know anyone who wanted either of them to continue past their first. Yet here we are with director Scott Speer's

Step Up Revolution

, which finds a ragtag group of Miami flash-mob-ers trying save their imperiled neighborhood by winning a YouTube contest, a plot that, had the technology existed in the '30s, Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland might've deemed a tad cornball for their tastes. The film's sincerity-bordering-on-naïveté is actually rather charming, and Lord knows the dancers are impressive – or

would

be, if we were allowed to witness their moves in shots lasting longer than three seconds. (Sadly, there are no scenes to rival the glorious, uninterrupted "I Won't Dance"

pas de deux

from

Step Up 3D,

though that number's fabulously gifted Adam G. Sevani does make a welcome cameo here.)

But for all of

Step Up Revolution

's eye-catching, candy-colored exuberance – which really pops in its 3D presentation – it's still a blandly formulaic, forgettable outing, and one that actually turns rather grim in its final minutes, when characters who have steadfastly refused to sell out their talents instantly leap at the chance to sign with Nike. Oh, kids. Just don't do it.

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