

Skit-ish: "Movie 43," "Parker," and "Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters"

Written by Mike Schulz

Sunday, 27 January 2013 18:40

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MOVIE 43

Ordinarily, *Movie 43* would be the sort of unsatisfying, throwaway release that I'd dispense with in a paragraph, or maybe just a sentence or two. And it's not as though its opening-weekend box-office intake – a meager \$5 million, despite the presence of nearly every star in Hollywood – necessitates longer consideration of the film. But this anthology comedy in the style of those '70s cult classics *Kentucky Fried Movie* and *The Groove Tube* seems to me a special case. How often, after all, do you get the chance to write about what might be your all-time least-enjoyable experience at the cineplex –

including

that time during the early '90s when you had to leave a screening for emergency root-canal surgery?

I thought about describing *Movie 43* as the worst movie I've ever seen, but that might not be true; there actually is one clever, amusing *faux* PSA tucked within the picture, explaining how all those vending and copy machines that we occasionally kick in frustration are filled with small children doing all the labor. (I'd acknowledge the helmer of this surprisingly sharp, 60-second effort, but despite

Movie 43

's dozen segments boasting no fewer than 12 separate directors among them, I've been

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unsuccessful in finding out who's responsible for "Machine Kids.") What I'm absolutely certain of, though, is that no previous film I've attended has made me feel so embarrassed for the people on-screen, and so embarrassed to be sitting in a darkened auditorium. The entirety of this incessantly filthy yet staggeringly unfunny outing should come wrapped in a brown paper bag, or hidden in the lower reaches of someone's sock drawer.

Just in case, for the crap-flick fanatics among you, I've now made the film sound like a must-see, I assure you that *Movie 43's* badness isn't any kind of *enjoyable* badness; Michael J. Nelson and the RiffTrax crew aren't going to have any fun ripping it to shreds. What it is, instead, is a sketch-comedy assemblage in which you keep praying that the last sketch you saw would prove to be its worst, only to discover that nope, there's a new one to top it. Considering that the movie's directors – who include Brett Ratner, Steven Brill, and Peter Farrelly (working without brother Bobby) – generally display such varying degrees of visual acumen in their work, I was a little surprised that the individual offerings in

Movie 43

all look equally terrible, as though their hazy, under-lit images were coated in a light sprinkling of dust. But I was positively shocked to discover that the film's blackout skits were all equally devoid of laughs, even when the material, awful though it was, was being acted by usually infallible comedians such as Chris Pratt, Bobby Cannavale, and Stephen Merchant. In

Movie 43, no one

winds up looking good, and only one or two performers manage to escape with any shred of dignity. (For a while, I thought Greg Kinnear might, but then he held Common at gunpoint and ordered him to fellate a security guard.)

We're given a pretty strong indication of what we're in for with the very first sketch, in which Kate Winslet (!!!) goes on a blind date with Hugh Jackman (!!!) only to discover that the man has testicles growing from his neck. Take a moment to chuckle at that, if you must, and then take a moment to imagine all the high-*lair*-ious high jinks that could ensue from such a situation, especially if the date took place in a crowded restaurant and Jackman's character ordered a bowl of soup. Then, after you've exhausted your list of comic possibilities, imagine those gags being played out over a stretch of seven minutes, at half-speed, with actors looking as though their minds are elsewhere – specifically, on the many ways they're planning to murder their agents. That's the experience of *Movie 43* times 12.

In the "Homeschooled" segment, Liev Schreiber and Naomi Watts take turns giving their high-schooler son lessons in "real world" teendom, complete with rampant bullying and unwanted sexual advances. In "The Proposition," Pratt and Anna Faris plan a date night involving the latter's yearning to be defecated on. In "Super Hero Speed Dating," Jason Sudeikis' Batman continually thwarts the romantic prospects of Justin Long's Robin. And so it goes, with each tiresome, repellent, one-joke offering somehow sinking lower than the one that

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came before; I started watching the movie with slack-jawed amazement at its juvenile amateurishness, and ended up staring at the thing with grim, dead-eyed loathing. It hardly takes much to make Gerard Butler, Dennis Quaid, Johnny Knoxville, and Seann William Scott thoroughly unappealing on-screen, as this film does. But once you've got Halle Berry stirring guacamole with her breast, and Emma Stone swapping filthy non sequiturs with Kieran Culkin, and Chloë Moretz (*no-o-o-!!!*) being denigrated for having her first period, you've crossed a line that you can't recover from. A buddy and I left *Movie 43* the second the end credits started rolling, which meant that we actually ended up *missing*

a segment, one that, from what I understand, took place halfway through those credits. What a relief. The others, for a few years, may not be so lucky, but at least I can continue to look at Elizabeth Banks and Josh Duhamel without wanting to weep.



PARKER

That Jason Statham is appearing in a new, bone-crunching action flick is hardly news. That Jason Statham is appearing in a new, bone-crunching action flick that's actually quite good is *huge*

news. To be sure, much of the success of Statham's

Parker –

which casts its star as an honor-bound thief seeking vengeance on the partners who double-crossed him – can be attributed to its director, Taylor Hackford. (The man's works don't offer much visual life, but with his résumé boasting

An Officer & a Gentleman

,
The Devil's Advocate

, and

Ray

, Hackford is certainly a more-than-competent craftsman, and easily the strongest director Statham has worked with in ages.) But in one of the happier surprises of the still-young movie year, what really makes the movie sail is John J. McLaughlin's script – an adaptation of a Donald E. Westlake

noir

showcasing effectively pungent dialogue, a healthy share of earned laughs, a lovely, touching subplot for Jennifer Lopez (winning and wonderful here), and more breaks from convention than

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a movie of its type should reasonably offer. The action scenes, especially one particularly bloody battle in a high-rise condo, are staged with considerable skill and sensational impact, and the enjoyable Statham headlines a terrifically fine cast that includes Nick Nolte, Michael Chiklis, Clifton Collins Jr., Wendell Pierce, Patti LuPone, and Bobby Cannavale (redeeming himself, somewhat, for his participation in

Movie 43

). But when was the last time you saw a terse, violent thriller that not only ended with a huge laugh, but even managed to put an original spin on that dreaded, obligatory "Six Months Later" tag? Some clunky and awkward exposition aside,

Parker

is a topnotch midwinter entertainment. For a movie of its type, it's damned near miraculous.



HANSEL & GRETEL: WITCH HUNTERS

After enduring last year's hopelessly poor, shockingly laugh-less *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, the prospect of sitting

through an entrail-splattering, revisionist-fairytale lark titled

Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters

filled me with such trepidation that I almost skipped the film entirely, planning to cite car trouble or visiting relatives or some other excuse for my dereliction of duty. But although the visual effects in director Tommy Wirkola's outing are mostly crummy and the editing mostly spotty and the action scenes mostly endless, I actually didn't have a terrible time at the movie. Jeremy Renner and Gemma Arterton provide some stone-faced diversion as the titular siblings, while Famke Janssen, as their targeted nemesis, cackles and mugs with abandon. The witches' makeup is impressively gross. The film's blessed 80-minute running length doesn't allow us much chance to get bored. And unlike

Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter

, the movie (with Will Ferrell and Adam McKay among its credited producers) is, every once in a while, really funny. Wirkola's and co-screenwriter Dante Harper's dialogue may lean toward the overheated and silly, but it's hard not to enjoy a campy period fable that plasters the faces of missing kids on old-timey milk bottles, or that finds its Hansel – having been force-fed sweets by a witch in his youth – having to now deal with something even more life-threatening: diabetes.

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