

## Dead Sober: "The Hangover Part III," "Epic," and "Fast & Furious 6"

Written by Mike Schulz  
Sunday, 26 May 2013 16:16

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### ***THE HANGOVER PART III***

Not long into *The Hangover Part III*, our mishap-prone heroes portrayed by Bradley Cooper, Ed Helms, and Zach Galifianakis are seen sipping beers at a karaoke bar, discussing the best way to handle their latest mess initiated by Ken Jeong's eccentric gangster/eternal thorn-in-the-side Mr. Chow. Though this might constitute a minor spoiler, the casual drinks consumed in this scene are, to my recollection, the only drinks – indeed, the only judgment-impairing substances of any kind – consumed in the entire movie. That makes director Todd Phillips' outing a *Hangover* without hangovers. In the end, it's also a *Hangover* without *The Hangover*.

For viewers who've loved both sequels to 2009's joyously crude "What did we *do* last night?!" slapstick, the collective critical shrug that's greeted *The Hangover Part III*'s release might be the reason so many people hate movie reviewers: We bitched because *Part II* was too much like the original, and we're bitching now because *Part III*

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isn't like the original  
*enough*

. But this latest and purportedly last Wolf Pack adventure truly is a strange, and strangely unsatisfying, piece of work. In outline, the film boasts a totally workable comedic premise in which John Goodman's mobster, having had millions in gold bars stolen by the aforementioned Mr. Chow, demands that Cooper's Phil, Helms' Stu, and Galifianakis' Alan capture and turn over the mincing weirdo for punishment, even though they have no earthly idea where to find him. (Justin Bartha's kidnapped Doug is Goodman's insurance policy, meaning that Bartha, yet again, is unceremoniously dropped from the picture 20 minutes after entering it.) But as the trio continually searches for, finds, and loses Chow on the Las Vegas strip, we're confronted with a gradual but unmistakable realization: Not only is

*The Hangover Part III*

not very funny; it doesn't appear  
*designed*  
to be funny.

All told, Phillips' trilogy-ender, with its script co-written by Craig Mazan, isn't an unimpressive piece of work, and it's certainly preferable to the depressingly lazy and uninspired rehash that was *The Hangover Part II*. Gone are the familiar conceits that the first sequel felt all too beholden to; there's no morning-after sequence of inebriated confusion, no reconstruction of the previous night's events, no photographic, "here's what *actually* happened" replay as the end credits roll. (Maybe one occurred deep into those credits, but I didn't stick around long enough to find out. If a comedy doesn't make you laugh in its first 100 minutes, nothing that happens in the last 90 seconds will likely do the trick.) Meanwhile, the three leads – Cooper with his lackadaisical arrogance, Helms with his barely concealed panic, Galifianakis with his childlike cluelessness – share a comfortable, unforced rapport, Goodman delivers some legitimate menace, and Jeong, rather unexpectedly, turns in a fiercely intense, first-rate dramatic performance.

But is this a series in which Jeong, as the sexually and ethically dubious Chow, *should* be giving a fiercely intense dramatic performance? There's a very early scene, one given away in the film's trailers, in which a giraffe is accidentally decapitated, and every once in a while there'll be a bit of audience-pleasing crudeness, as when Galifianakis and Melissa McCarthy share an overly lascivious flirtation over a red lollipop. (McCarthy, for her part, plays her latest insulting screen character with admirable straightforwardness and emotional honesty.) In general, though, the humor here is dishearteningly sidelined in favor of continued attempts at tension and suspense; the filmmakers and performers seem to be treating the film's kidnapping-and-murder storyline

*so*  
solemnly that there's almost no room left for any comic spontaneity, or any surprise. The actors go through the motions ably, yet they're being asked to wring laughs out of fundamentally unfunny material, and you can feel the audience's enthusiasm wane with every new, equally

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serious-minded development. (The silence that greeted the end credits at my crowded screening was *deafening*

.) By no means is the movie a debacle. It does, however, feel like a spectacularly ill-considered finale, one that smugly assumes a huge turnout regardless of whether it gives

*Hangover*

fans anything they previously turned out *for*

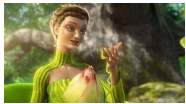
. Once upon a time,

*The Hangover*

appeared only concerned with our enjoyment.

*The Hangover Part III*

appears only concerned with our wallets.



**EPIC**

It takes a fair amount of nerve to title any movie *Epic*, especially when the release in question, at heart, is really little more than a run-of-the-mill animated comedy in which a young girl with daddy issues comes of age through a gentle romance, some minor excitement and peril, and the company of wisecrack-spewing goofballs. (At the end of the day, the same title could've been given to the recent prehistoric adventure

*The Croods* –

though

*Epoch*

may have been more fitting.) But it's a pleasure to report that, at least in visual terms,

*Epic*

proves the right moniker for director Chris Wedge's outing, a marvelously detailed, gorgeously colorful family entertainment that makes up in eye-popping grandeur what it lacks in dramatic interest. Telling of a race of two-inch-tall forest denizens and the teen who shrinks to their size, the narrative isn't very fresh, and the motivations given to the film's chief villain are so murky that even Christoph Waltz's delectably sinister readings don't do much to enliven the character. But the vocal performances – courtesy of Amanda Seyfried, Josh Hutcherson, Colin Farrell, Jason Sudeikis, Aziz Ansari, Chris O'Dowd, Beyoncé Knowles, and a gleefully off-kilter Steven Tyler – provide considerable fun, and the extraordinarily conceived,

*really*

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-up-close-and-personal renderings of dandelions and hummingbirds and such make for exceptionally rewarding viewing.

*Epic*

may not be epic, per se, yet in giving audiences so much to look at (and listen to) with nearly every scene, it's frequently awfully close to awesome.



### ***FAST & FURIOUS 6***

"We're not dealing with cops," says Paul Walker to his crime- and petroleum-fueled extended family in *Fast & Furious 6*. "We're not dealing with drug dealers. This is a *whole different level*." Well, it is and it isn't. There may not be cops and drug dealers in director Justin Lin's latest sequel to 2001's

*The Fast & the Furious*

, but you still know just what you're gonna get from this action thriller, and in copious quantities: car chases, shoot-outs, fistfights, generous closeups of female-extra backsides, and Vin Diesel grumbling in that fathoms-deep baritone that sounds like a sustained belch. The half-empty side of me found the movie repetitive, sentimental, and, at two-plus hours, deathly long. But the half-full side at least appreciated

*Fast & Furious 6*

's sharp editing, relaxed camaraderie, and extraordinary stuntwork, particularly the bit that involved a tank ramming through a truck, and that caused Chris "Ludacris" Bridges to slightly alter his facial expression from a Zen-like calm to a slightly more *surprised*

Zen-like calm. That may or may not be "a whole different level," but by this point, any minor diversion from

*F&F*

formula is a diversion worth celebrating.

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