



NUTTY PROFESSOR II: THE KLUMPS

You know exactly what you're going to get out of *Nutty Professor II: The Klumps*, and for the most part, that's a good thing. As the title indicates, the movie is more spin-off than sequel, as Eddie Murphy gives life to the Klumps, the vivacious and often beyond-vulgar kin to Sherman Klump, the obese genetics professor of the 1996 film.

Playing Sherman's proudly flatulent Papa, his glowing, level-headed Mama, his angry, vaguely threatening brother Ernie, and his hysterically crass and libidinous Granny – in addition to Sherman himself and his id Buddy Love – Murphy expounds on the genius he showed in the earlier film. All the family members are fully defined caricatures, and if their novelty effect is understandably diminished this time around, Murphy has made up for the loss by going even deeper into demented levels of character comedy. The scenes with the Klumps in *The Nutty Professor*

were, without question, that film's highlights, and audiences who longed for more of them will be more than satisfied with The Klumps.

Sadly, that satisfaction doesn't extend to the new plot, which is filled with pseudo-realistic scientific explanations and a few comic ideas too many. Among the many plotlines featured in *The Klumps*: Sherman discovers that traces of Buddy Love are still in his system, and the expurgation of him leads to his running amok in the city; Buddy's DNA, in a nod to *The Fly*, gets crossed with the DNA of a dog (a moderately clever idea that goes nowhere); Sherman discovers a sort of Fountain of Youth serum that has drastic effects on Papa; and Sherman, in a scientific accident, begins losing his intelligence. And I haven't even mentioned the gigantic hamster that takes vengeance on Larry Miller's odious dean.

A surfeit of ideas doesn't necessarily hurt a sequel – *Toy Story 2* had even more and pulled them all off gloriously – but it does when the introduction of them ruins the film's pacing. Every time a new scientific dilemma is added, it stops the movie in its tracks, and director Peter Segal doesn't seem to have brought much to the party in terms of timing and staging; it's as if he pointed the camera at Murphy in scene after scene and shouted, "Go!" Thankfully, Murphy is in good enough form that Segal can get away with that for much of the movie, but you find yourself all but forgetting about the plot and secondary characters (Janet Jackson appears as

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Written by Mike Schulz

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Sherman's professor girlfriend, not that it matters), and just wishing more time was spent with the Klumps themselves. Perhaps this sequel should have been a literal expansion of the Klumps' roles in *The Nutty Professor*: an hour and a half of them arguing around the dinner table, with no extraneous plotlines there to bother them, or us.

None of this will probably matter, though, to the The Klumps's audiences, because the movie is one of the very few this summer that lives up to its previews and the anticipation built into it. Yeah, there are about 50 scatological jokes too many, but the movie's vulgarity is often cathartic (as Papa and Granny, especially, Murphy shows that a filthy gag delivered loud and proud can be a beautiful thing), and it would be criminal to miss comic performances as magnificent as the ones Murphy delivers here. Robbed of an Oscar nomination for *The Nutty Professor*, he probably has even less of a chance for one here, but his brilliance is unmistakable. Aided by the tremendous make-up design of Rick Baker, Murphy brings the same understatement and shadings to his portrayal of Sherman, and then, as the Klumps, goes as far in the opposite direction as is humanly possible. It's a star performance of the highest level, and it turns a mediocre follow-up film into one of the true, few bright spots of this movie summer.



LOSER

While driving to the movie theatre last week to catch a screening of Amy Heckerling's *Loser*, I blew out my front left tire, and my trip was delayed. I took it as an omen. Having caught up with the film a few days later, it turns out my instincts were correct; while missing the screening wasn't worth having a near-accident on the highway, there's really no reason to see it at all. This teen comedy has an agreeably sweet nature and it has Mena Suvari, but there's nothing in it you haven't seen a thousand times before, and coming from writer-director Heckerling (who brought together a bunch of first-rate performers for *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Clueless*), the cast is, for the most part, surprisingly second-rate.

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Teen geek du jour Jason Biggs stars as Paul, who leaves the comforts of home to face university life in New York City. Once there, he immediately hooks up with three amazingly abusive fellow students (Zak Orth, Thomas Sadoski, and Jimmi Simpson) who ridicule him – rightly, it seemed to me – for his dorky behavior and stupid hat. (Paul could have saved himself a world of anguish by pitching the damn thing in the nearest wastebasket.) He also falls for the gorgeous Dora (Suvari), a student carrying on an affair with her professor (Greg Kinnear, going for Craig Kilborn-esque smarm). Will this loser find happiness? Is there even a question?

Heckerling can write smart dialogue, and she has been justifiably praised for her touching, nonjudgmental views of teen life in the past. (Occasional slapstick and all, *Fast Times* remains the most realistic, funny, and emotional teen flick ever.) But she's dealing with nothing but stereotypes here. The creepy roommates are pure sitcom (their lines don't sound spoken so much as delivered), and there's nothing at stake in the union between Paul and Dora; both are so obviously established as lovable screw-ups that the actors have nothing to do but act winsome. Biggs can't quite pull this off, but Suvari sure does. In just a handful of film roles – *American Beauty*, *American Pie*

, and even

The Rage: Carrie II

– she's brought something unique and memorable to each one of them, and has a perfect look that walks the fine line between knowing more than her years and knowing nothing at all. She's mostly wasted in her role as Dora but manages to display hidden undercurrents of sadness and joy; Heckerling would do well to write her a great role in a movie that's all her own before teen flicks are forced to do without her.