

Movie Review: "Monsters Vs. Aliens"™ show their humorous and human sides

by Lee Grant

If "Monsters Vs. Aliens" in 3-D is the filmgoing experience of the future, as DreamWorks Animation chief Jeffrey Katzenberg likes to pronounce, this exhilarating, lofty motion picture takes you there in a furious, fantastic ride.

RATINGS GUIDE:

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) It'll be a monster at the box office, enticing kids and adults with its mighty female hero, a role model for young girls, and state-of-the-art, jaw-dropping special effects.

Crafted by the talented folks toiling at DreamWorks' Glendale, Calif., campus, the animation is so realistic it's as if the characters are not cartoons at all, but living and breathing. They inhabit a vivid, small town and an ominous intergalactic world.

The voice-acting is superb, particularly Reese Witherspoon as Susan, who, on her wedding day, is hit by a meteorite. A petite, timid young person suddenly becomes Ginormica, a nearly 50-foot-tall being ready to take on invading robotic aliens.

Witherspoon creates a powerful character, emerging as not the usual female secondary superhero player but finding a confident, forceful self. She's something to behold in a scene on the Golden Gate Bridge battling a fierce foe and saving people trapped on the crumbling structure (the action eerily resembles the collapse of the Oakland Bay Bridge in 1989's Loma Prieta earthquake when cars were pancaked).

There's also Seth Rogen as B.O.B., a gelatinous, single-orbed blob of a gentle monster who doesn't have a brain but has a mouth that cracks one-liners. He's a hoot as a hugger with a crush on a Jell-O mold. "I think she gave me a fake phone number," he says after coming on to the dessert at a party.

Kiefer Sutherland as diminutive Gen. W.R. Monger moves way beyond his hushlike demeanor on TV's "24" into a gruffness as a military lifer in charge of keeping monsters off the streets until they're needed to combat the alien invasion. He's unable to show emotion, having lost his tear ducts in the war.

Also terrific are Rainn Wilson as the multieyed, multilimbed Gallaxhar, alien commander with a scary cloning machine (his minions march Nazi-like with a "Hail, Gallaxhar!" mantra); and Stephen Colbert, as The President, who thinks he's brave but he's not.

Colbert, whose "The Colbert Report" is a unique TV presence, is riotous as a chief executive with two red buttons at his disposal, one to set off missiles in case of attack and another to brew and serve up a cup of espresso.

The special effects are, so to speak, out-of-this-world. Co-directors Rob ("Shark Tale") Letterman and Conrad ("Shrek 2") Vernon created such memorable scenes as Witherspoon's Susan in a chase through San Francisco using two automobile convertibles strapped to her feet as a kind of roller blades.

For little kids, the film gets intense with references to death and the end of the world. There's an unfunny soiled pants joke and some "boobie" references. These are minor. What's really here is Witherspoon as

something out of "Attack of the 50 Foot Woman," the 1950s horror flick, and her female-centric bearing.

The film has artistry, heart and humor, substance and sweetness. It's the filmgoing experience of the future.

"Monsters Vs. Aliens." Rated: PG. Running time: 1 hour, 34 minutes. 4 stars.

Copyright 2009 Creators Syndicate Inc.

Movie Review: "Monsters Vs. Aliens"™ show their humorous and human sides by Lee Grant