Movie Review: 'Shrek the Third'

by David_Elliott

"Shrek the Third" sounds more like a dynasty than a sequel. And, for sure, the grosses are regal - the first and second films cost together about $135 million and have grossed (U.S. alone) more than $700 million.

'SHREK THE THIRD' - Shrek encounters the magic teacher, Merlin, in 'Shrek the Third.' CNS Photo courtesy of DreamWorks Animation. Shrek, green hero of "Shrek the Third," gets primped and pampered, as well he might, since the series has had a golden chain of box-office success.

But the third movie has the look of royal inbreeding. Moving down the crimson carpet of guaranteed grosses, wearing the smug crown of "imagineering" turned as insular as a studio conference call, it's a busy but curiously empty comedy. Even when laughing, we can gaze right through it into the merchandising depot.

The fun bunch is back, including the giant, green, lovable ogre Shrek (voiced by Mike Myers) and his chum Donkey (Eddie Murphy). Princess Fiona (Cameron Diaz) is still a dearie.

But you might wonder how much the makers really know the characters. They have the fabled raunch flipster Murphy at one point asking about sex, "How does it happen?" And minutes later he is back in naughty form: "I feel all exposed, and nasty."

Kids will relish the poop jokes and maybe the snark line, "My butt is itchin' up a storm" (enough to turn

Walt Disney peuce). Older kids (really old) might go for the early schtick about dinner theater, and maybe having Julie Andrews on board OKs the silly dud musical at the end, an ego preen for obnoxious Prince Charming (Rupert Everett).

Some of the gags slip in well. Having Donkey do a cat hiss is cute, there's a swell nightmare about ogre babies, and the idea of Andrews (as starchy Queen Lillian) head-butting a stone wall is almost satire. But when princely mall hunk Arthur (Justin Timberlake) crows, "I'm building my city, people - rock and roll!," it's in the same recycle bin as the frog king's burial to the guitar storm of Paul McCartney's "Live and Let Die."

The computer animation sways from quaint stylization to pure naturalism; Arthur seems virtually a real actor. What tends to turkey this 'toon is not the sleek artwork but the lack of genuine story shaping. It's held together by nothing but the chewed gum of feeble show-biz ideas, and that swivels the dominant tone from medieval to mediocre.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Essentially the movie is saying to its loyal crowd: You bought this stuff before, now take it re-canned. There is nothing really happening but the breezy ricochet of gags, the rote sitcom types, the star voices that are phoning in performances, the cuteness given a little by riffs about sexual attraction or body functions, the ruling swagger of assured box office. Inside the packaging is more packaging. Those who rally to it with, "So it isn't a critics' picture," had better be under 10 years old.

A DreamWorks Animation SKG release. Directors: Chris Miller, Raman Hui. Writers: Andrew Adamson, Howard Gould. Voice cast: Julie Andrews, Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz, Eric Idle, Justin Timberlake, Antonio Banderas. Running time: 1 hour, 37 minutes. Rated PG. 2 stars.

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