

ENTERTAINMENT

MOVIE REVIEW

Austin Powers' Latest, 'Goldmember' Amuses, But Fails to Rise Above Potty Humor

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There was never any danger I was going into the latest Austin Powers flick, "Goldmember," with my expectations too high.

While always dependable laugh-getters, the previous Austin Powers flicks are already beginning to show their age, and the trailers for this third one didn't seem to hold much promise that the franchise wasn't just coasting on its audience's good will at this point.

And there's a deep, deep well of good will for the franchise, if last weekend's record box office grosses are any indication.

"Goldmember" is, if nothing else, a shrewdly concocted confection.

It starts off with a barrage of celebrity cameos so overwhelming that it just sucks the audience in, then leaves them putty in the filmmakers' hands.

It seems no matter how silly things get from there, you keep remembering, "Well, gee — if Tom Cruise thought this movie was worth his time, it must certainly be worth mine!"

And for the most part, it is — both silly, and worth the brisk 90 minutes it takes to sit through it.

This time, British super-spy Powers (Mike Myers) travels back through time to the 1970s to thwart the evil schemes of a villain whose motif and excesses are specific to his pop-cultural era; in this case, Eurotrash disco mogul Johann van der Smut, aka Goldmember.

Goldmember is, of course, played by Mike Myers, as are the other three principal leads. I'm not sure one actor has played so many lead parts in the same film since Peter Sellers in Stanley Kubrick's definitive Cold War comedy, "Dr. Strangelove."

To his credit, Myers pulls it off admirably, and with apparent good humor.

On the other hand, Goldmember himself seems to be the least thought-out character of the entire Austin Powers canon. With a vague accent, lame catchlines and scant screen time, he's just window dressing for Meyers' other trio of comic personas.

And of the three, only Dr. Evil registers as anything other than a one-gag wonder,

even though they try to give Fat Bastard a little dramatic business this time out.

Myers and the film's director, Jay Roach, even try to introduce some potentially touchy-feely father & son issues — Austin is still trying to win his father's approval, and a rivalry erupts between Mini-Me and Dr. Evil's son (Seth Green) — but it's hard to tell how seriously they expect it to be taken.

Really, this whole plot thread is just a red herring. This movie is about bodily functions and appendages, period.

It should come as no surprise to anyone who's ever seen a James Bond flick that this movie eventually settles in and follows Powers' attempts to keep Goldmember from destroying the world.

Along the way, Powers acquires a beautiful female sidekick (Destiny's Child thrush Beyoncé Knowles) and reunites with his super-spy Dad, veteran British character actor Michael Caine.

Sadly, neither of the two rises (or sinks) to Myers' level of inspired immaturity.

Knowles' character, Foxy Cleopatra, is a rather tepid send-up of Blaxploitation Flick superstar Pam Grier, herself a much

more fiery, provocative screen presence than the lovely, but vapid Miss Knowles.

On the way to resolving this episode's nominal threat to world safety, there is no end of potty humor, much silly use of silhouettes and two (count 'em two!) complete musical production numbers.

The best of the two involves Dr. Evil and his clone, Mini-Me (Verne Troyer), doing an inspired take-off on rapper Jay-Z's version of "It's a Hard Knock Life" from the Broadway musical "Annie."

There are also long-ish stretches where nothing of note or interest really happens, but just when it seems the filmmakers have wrung the last laugh out of the material, another extended bit of infantile hilarity comes along.

Even when Myers is slumming, he doesn't fail to entertain.

The bottom line is, this movie is sure to appeal to the sniggering six-year-old boy in everyone. It's packed with just enough cheap gags, done just well enough to get its dirty business done and make it worth the six or seven bucks it takes to get in.