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SEE

Meet the worst parody of the year

filmreview

Meet the Spartans

Now Playing
Written and Directed by Jason
Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer
Starring Sean Maguire, Carmen
Electra, and Kevin Sorbo

PAUL BLINOV
Arts & Entertainment Editor
CONAL PIERSE
Opinion Editor

We figured that the reason *Meet the Spartans* was the number-one movie at the box office this past weekend was because there was absolutely nothing else for moviegoers to do. For some inexplicable reason, people went to the movies and, realizing that their only other choice was the gratuitously violent *Rambo*, decided to opt for a comedy. The word “comedy” is used loosely here, as laughter was almost completely absent outside the first ten minutes.

It's an unsettling feeling when a movie makes a lengthy joke—in this case, a dance sequence to “I Will Survive”—and nobody in the theatre laughs during any of it, not even the lady who seemed to be howling at everything the first ten minutes tossed her way. But that was how *Meet the Spartans* went for most of its mercifully brief runtime. Though there were only 20 people in the audience, that was still \$160 that the movie didn't deserve to earn. Seeing it is equivalent to stepping in dog shit while barefoot: perhaps funny to others who don't have to experience it, but gut-wrenchingly frustrating to have happen to oneself.

Meet The Spartans follows the basic plot of swords-and-sandals flick *300*; King Leonidas (Sean Maguire) leads a small army of men—in this case, 13—to defend Sparta against the invading armies of Xerxes while his wife (Carmen Electra) tries to



rally support from Sparta's political leaders. Of course, all of *300*'s major scenes get spoofed, such as Leonidas' oft-repeated “This! Is! Sparta!” kick. But for all the times you've overheard someone drunkenly shout that line aloud to their friends, seeing him punt Britney Spears into the gaping hole failed to garner even a cracked smile. Yes, Spears has had her share of problems, and King Leonidas' boot was over-popularized, but a ten-minute sequence of him kicking random F-list Celebrities into a pit isn't funny. It's tired, and it's been done before.

But perhaps worse than the bad writing and poor comedic timing was the fact that the movie assumed that the audience was too unintelligent to “get” half the jokes. They even went so far as to zoom in on a clearly labelled “Rocky” logo on a punch-drunk boxer's shorts, just in case we missed the clever reference they were making.

The movie seemed to rely on the fact that you had indeed seen other movies or an episode of *Access Hollywood*, and therefore, their weak attempts at pop culture humour would be familiar to you and thus elicit some chuckles.

If you're wondering where the funding for a movie like this would come from, the answer is shameless product placement. While they tried to play them off as jokes, it was quite obvious that the half-hearted jabs at Dentyne and Gatorade were about as sincere as a Simpson's Butterfingers or Burger King commercial.

And then, as if *Meet the Spartans* hadn't put you through enough, the credits come attached with another dance to “I Will Survive.” Yes folks, there's two separate unbearable moments set to that song.

Nobody really wanted to talk about *Meet the Spartans* on the LRT home; it was like we'd all just went through a hostage situation and were the only ones to make it out alive. Two people, however, did benefit from *Meet the Spartans*: writers Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer. To them, this whole thing was a success: they had the number-one movie last weekend, which means their next atrocious film will likely get the green light while better, funnier movies are given the thumbs down. And after seeing *Meet the Spartans*, that's the most depressing thought imaginable.

MacGregor's serves up a thin script

Despite a promising story, Daniel MacDonald's characters fail to explore it well

theatreview

MacGregor's Hard Ice Cream and Gas

Runs until 10 February
Directed by John Hudson
Starring Coralie Cairns, Jesse Gervais,
Mark Jenkins, and Myla Southward
Varscona Theatre (10329 83 Avenue)

MARIA KOTOVYCH
Arts & Entertainment Staff

In *MacGregor's Hard Ice Cream and Gas*, the MacGregor family must make some fairly difficult decisions as the cold and snow grip the Saskatchewan prairie, the least of which includes figuring out what to do with Mr MacGregor's corpse—the frozen land precludes an immediate burial. Furthermore, the fragmented family, now reunited, must resolve some long-standing interpersonal conflicts. Part comedy, part drama, this show begins with promise but winds up falling as flat as the Saskatchewan landscape.

The biggest problem with *MacGregor's* is Daniel MacDonald's script: it doesn't allow for any character development. Through a series of flashbacks, we see oldest daughter Missy (Myla Southward) and her mother (Coralie Cairns) together in various interactions throughout her youth. We also learn that Missy left

home at 17, but now she's returned 19 years later, her tummy bulging with a long-overdue pregnancy.

That's all fine and good, but the 36-year-old Missy really hasn't changed in the time she's been away: in her first encounter with her mother, the dynamic between them more closely resembles a mom/teen relationship rather than a discourse more likely to occur between a mother and her adult daughter. And dialogue like “You're not really pregnant,” “Yes, I am,” “No, you're not,” “Yes I am,” that occurs between Missy and her younger brother Fred (Jesse Gervais) sounds ridiculous and completely unrealistic coming from a pair of thirtysomethings.

The actors do their absolute best with the material they are given, but unfortunately, their potential lies largely untapped with a script that lacks sufficient character development or a range of emotions. For instance, Missy returns home to learn that her father had passed away. The moment she learns of her father's passing might have been a nice opportunity for the character to exhibit some emotion, but all Missy does when she receives the bad news is say something like “Poor Dad.” While the family is painted as dysfunctional, the level of their problems don't justify the antipathy that Missy exhibits towards her father's passing. Similarly, the other

characters' reactions to Missy's return are completely unrealistic. Rather than addressing her 19-year absence and their feelings about her return, the characters' main preoccupation revolves around whether or not Missy should sleep in the parlour. The script takes a very surface-level approach to what could be a better exploration of this family's dynamic.

MacGregor's shares many similarities with *The Mighty Carlins*, which recently showed in Edmonton: both plays feature a family that reunites shortly after the death of a family member, and both plays depict a less-than-perfect group trying to work through their past problems.

But while *The Mighty Carlins* managed to evoke a multi-layered picture of the deceased Mrs Carlin, *MacGregor's* gives very little insight into the late patriarch, other than showing that he opened a store, was obsessed with the accordion, and paid very little attention to his family—other than youngest son Jack (Mark Jenkins), who helped him in the store.

If audiences wish to see a play about a dysfunctional family that works through its problems after the passing of a family member, they should hope that *The Mighty Carlins* returns to Edmonton someday; *MacGregor's Hard Ice Cream and Gas* lacks the both powerful punch and realistic script of that show.

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