

At the movies



The steller heroes of Mel Brooks' "Spaceballs" include (left to right) John Candy as Barf the Mawg; Lorene Yarnell as Dot Matrix (voice provided by Joan Rivers); Daphne Zuniga as Princess Vespa; and Bill Pullman as hero-for hire Lone Star.

Courtesy photo

'Eastwick' contains divine performances

Divine powers simmer and erupt in "The Witches of Eastwick," a film now playing at Eugene's National Theatre.

Based on a novel of the same name by John Updike, the film depicts how the supernatural powers of three women blossom when the devil comes to town.

colors shines above the other women.

The screenplay, by Michael Cristofer, blends supernatural qualities with real life counterparts, removing the tale from the horror genre and placing it firmly, through his characters, as a study of human nature and behavior.

Review by Jackie Barry

The story line of the film deviates significantly from that of the novel, but the movie version is an improvement on Updike's theme, which depicts the women as vengeful and self-serving, with no devil to influence them at all. The film, on the other hand, includes only men of dubious character: a philandering school principal, a spineless newspaper publisher and the devil.

Jack Nicholson gives a definitive performance as the devil, embodied in Darryl Van Horne. One comes to expect a good show based on Nicholson's previous work, but his uncouth behavior and dummy exterior reach new heights in this role.

The witches (Cher as Alexandra, Susan Sarandon as Jane, and Michelle Pfeiffer as Sukie) don't fare as well, leaning a little too much toward the beautiful but stupid variety. Their performances are adequate, however, with Sarandon attaining excellence most often.

Veronica Cartwright embodies Van Horne's antithesis as Felicia Gabriel. Cartwright's performance as a goody-two-shoes possessed by her awareness of Van Horne's true

The witches typify strong, female characters fighting the natural desire to have a man in their lives. But when they get together and all think the same thoughts, their influence proves strong enough to start a downpour, heave the bowels of the earth, and bring the devil to town.

Van Horne, despite his unattractive demeanor, knows how to pique a variety of women's interests toward self-serving ends. He pinpoints Alexandra's frustration and tells her a woman is like a hose with the futility of the world pouring through her. He tells Jane the burning of midwives as witches is just another example of male-dominated society exploiting women. He tells them both, "Let it out. I can take it. I want it."

The physical appearance of the film contributes heavily to its success. The locations used in the New England town as autumn leaves swirl around the gabled roof tops, the long-legged sensual beauty of the witches — one blond, one auburn, the other ebony haired, and the furnishings of Van Horne's mansion replete with elaborate ancient furnishings and a wall covered ceiling to floor with television monitors make the appearance of the film a rich, visual feast.

'Spaceballs' uses familiar jokes

Mel Brooks has always used the shotgun approach to comedy: spray enough shots at your target and something is bound to find the mark. The measure of his success is whether or not the hits outnumber the misses.

Review by Aaron Knox

In his latest release, "Spaceballs," they do not. His targets are simply a little too distant to be effective. The film is largely a parody of "Star Wars," which was released more than 10 years ago, and the gags have all been done before by filmmakers, either by accident or design, in countless ripoffs of the original.

Brooks went out of his way to include passing shots at a few other pictures in the science-fiction genre (most notably "Star Trek" and "Alien") in an attempt to minimize the fact the "Star Wars" material is hopelessly dated. But the efforts have all the earmarks of post-

production salvage work in the editing room, and that is uncharacteristic of Brooks' better efforts.

Other problems with this movie are further examples of bad timing. Brooks gives a lot of screen time to a female C3PO (called Dot Matrix) played with the voice of Joan Rivers. Now, I have never been a Rivers fan, but the precipitous decline in her popularity recently must have had Brooks reaching for the Tums and crossing his fingers.

Another problem with this movie, which is a problem with all Brooks movies it seems, is his preoccupation with black stereotypes. It was disturbing to note the audience laughed at the jokes involving familiar black typecasting, while those involving Jewish caricatures did not.

In light of the fact that Brooks is himself Jewish, one can't attach any malicious intent to it. I would have to place the blame for this reaction squarely with the audience, but the inclusion of both racist cliches perpetuate

images inconsistent with a contemporary and enlightened social reality.

The editing, to which I earlier referred, is disappointing and even amateurish at times.

In spite of all that is wrong with it, this is a difficult movie not to recommend. Rick Moranis and John Candy are well cast in their respective roles. Brooks has his moments (the best of which involves the common last name of the members of the Spaceball crew), and there is a lot of genuinely funny stuff here, both in the form of throwaway one-liners and quick sight gags.

Dom Deluise makes a cameo as Pizza the Hut. That is clever, but it has been seen nearly in its entirety on TV previews. Other performances, including that of George Wyner as Colonel Sandurz, are small but effective.

The entire sci-fi genre has become such an institutional part of our culture that it lends itself naturally to satire, and Brooks is at his best when he lays it on thick. Running gags

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