

'White Castle' a 'stoner comedy' worth watching

Likable characters and familiar humor combine for a fun summer flick

RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

"Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle," is not that good of a movie. Of course, this hardly detracts from its overall value. It is a mindlessly inventive stoner comedy that never makes any claims to being any more than passably clever. The whole affair seems to have one purpose, which is to entertain people during the hot summer months. When it gets hot enough, some people will see anything just to spend a few hours in an air-conditioned theater. These people are the film's central market.

MOVIE REVIEW

The film stars John Cho and Kal Penn as the straight-laced accountant Harold and the slacker would-be medical student Kumar. The two are suffering from post-collegiate arrested development. Harold is stuck in a job he hates with people who take advantage of his meekness. Kumar does nothing but tell his father that he really will go to medical school this time, so that his dad will keep paying the rent on the apartment he shares with Harold.

The film begins with a standard road-movie opening, as two white coworkers of Harold, one a party animal and one not, discuss their weekend plans. They dump their work on Harold in order to spend the weekend at nightclubs and then drive off to the sound of peppy,



Aaron Sullivan Illustration

John Cho and Kal Penn star in the comedy, 'Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle,' currently playing at Cinemark 17.

modern pop music. Everything about the film sets it up to look like these are going to be the main characters in another cookie-cutter buddy movie, but then the camera pans back to the office, where Harold looks over his ruined weekend. It's as if the film decided it didn't like its main characters and decided to go off and follow a stereotype (the Asian Accountant) to see what his life is like.

Kumar persuades him to get stoned (while watching a hilarious take on anti-marijuana advertisements) and with a severe case of the munchies they head off to find a

White Castle burger joint (for you other West-Coast yokels, White Castle serves a miniature burger called the "slider," which does to your arteries what mudslides do to highways). They spend the rest of the night traveling across the land, experiencing a variety of mishaps and adventures, until they finally reach their destination, have epiphanies about their lives and end up as better people. There. End of film.

But the plot is simply a clothesline on which to hang a variety of oddball occurrences, mixing a wholesome collection of toilet humor, celebrity cameos, absurd

dialog, cultural stereotypes and all the other facets of modern American comedy. Other than the nationality of the two leads, both of whom are very engaging in their roles, not much separates this from any other standard-issue comedy. Other than its quality, that is.

The film is, actually, surprisingly funny. The leads are so good-natured that you actually care whether they get to White Castle or not. Their stoner nature is enduring and the way they confront the stereotypes thrown at them is original without being preachy. When Harold is presented with an East Asian club who

wants to hear that being a junior analyst is as good as they expect it to be, he blanches and politely lies to them. Kumar is faced with the dilemma of being expected to become a doctor, while simultaneously being good at it. Having to balance the need to rebel from his father and the fact that he actually wants to do what is expected of him is an interesting conundrum.

What pulls the movie to its conclusion is the likable nature of the two leads. They are much better actors than any low-brow comedy deserves, and they work well together, often pulling off some of the most ridiculous dialog imaginable without flicking an eye. The situations thrown at them have the ring of sketch comedy, as things happen without explanation and are never referred to again. In one scene, Kumar gets out to pee behind a bush in an isolated, wooded area. He is joined by a man in a business suit who uses the same bush for the same reason. You know how awkward some men get when they have to stand next to each other while using urinals? Yeah, worse than that. The man's presence is inexplicable, and it feels like the scriptwriters threw it in on a lark.

The humor is stoner humor, plain and simple. It's Cheech and Chong for a younger crowd, and like those two toking societal rejects, it's a good time when it works, passable when it doesn't. The film doesn't ask much of its audience, and any audience shouldn't expect much of the film. All in all, it's a good time and a pleasant diversion during the dull summer months.

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a wounded beast. This track's companion piece, "Dreams Recurring," is a minute and a half of this played backwards. It actually sounds more tuneful. Must be played loud in order to understand its glory.

Glenn Branca, "Symphony #3 (Gloria)." A bizarre tone experiment from this New York City composer that is a haunting piece of work. Played with monotonous, grinding repetition on nothing but electric string instruments and some occasional percussion, it's an odd, moving piece of trance work that drills itself into you. The short third movement is the most melodic, sounding like classical music played by ghosts.

Negativland, "Christianity is Stupid." The most controversial track on the excellent "Escape From Noise" album. The band members once claimed the song caused a kid to commit mass murder, then laughed their asses off at the

subsequent media frenzy, which resulted when news outlets started quoting each other rather than checking out the facts for themselves. Aside from the controversy, the song is some of the band's best work, featuring a spliced-up sound bite put to creepy, plodding guitar noise. A good example of how sound bites can be made to say just about anything if edited properly.

Can, "Soup." The longest track on the German group's "Ege Bamyasi" album. It starts off as a groovy piece of jazz rock, but slowly and subtly grows more abrasive until it finally drops its rhythm altogether and becomes a twisted experiment in electronic noise manipulation. The harsh and unforgiving nature of the music would drive most away, but everything is pulled back together in the next track, the almost funky "I'm So Green." The whole album still sounds as though it could have come out last year, even though it was released in 1972. Brilliant.

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DYNAMITE

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online with babes all day. Besides, we both know that I'm training to be a cage fighter."

But it's the loopy confidence of Napoleon Dynamite (incidentally, an Elvis Costello pseudonym from his 1986 album "Blood and Chocolate") that drives the plot and coaxes the most laughs. Some of the film's shiniest moments are when Napoleon, an avid fantasy fan and (unspeakably) amateur artist, casually lets the unreal slip into the

everyday. When drawing a liger, he explains to potential dork-love interest Deb (Tina Majorino of "Waterworld"), "It's pretty much my favorite animal. It's like a lion and a tiger mixed ... bred for its skills in magic."

The film's plot is tenuous and secondary and the tangles of character development are enthralling enough that the slapdash 30-second conclusions to the several subplots are largely unsatisfying. But viewers will likely (and should) forgive this point, and given the film's sheer quotability, they might just forget it.

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EVETT

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nickname from his Fernandes Fretless Native Pro guitar, which he has had outfitted with a mirrored glass fingerboard of his own design. He has recently released a solo album, "I Stole," on Empty Beach Records.

Cafe Paradiso is located at 115 West Broadway. Singer/songwriter Janet Robin will open the show at 8 p.m. Evett's performance will begin at 9 p.m. There is an \$8 cover charge.

— Ryan Nyburg

Box office

U.S. movie revenues for July 30-Aug. 1. All dollar figures in millions.

Rank	Film	Weekend gross	Gross to date	Weeks in release	Screens
1.	The Village	\$50.7	\$50.7	One week	3,730
2.	The Bourne Supremacy	\$24.2	\$98.8	Two weeks	3,180
3.	Manchurian Candidate	\$20.0	\$20.0	One week	2,867
4.	I, Robot	\$10.4	\$115.0	Three weeks	3,204
5.	Spider-Man 2	\$8.6	\$344.4	Five weeks	3,001
6.	Catwoman	\$6.4	\$29.8	Two weeks	3,117
7.	Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle	\$5.5	\$5.5	One week	2,135
8.	A Cinderella Story	\$4.9	\$40.3	Three weeks	2,350
9.	Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy	\$3.1	\$78.2	Four weeks	2,032
10.	Fahrenheit 9/11	\$3.1	\$109.4	Six weeks	1,217

SOURCE: Exhibitor Relations Co. AP