

Sugarpants & Doting Dad

Blending the families

MEET THE FOCKERS: Directed by Jay Roach. Written by John Hamburg and James Herzfeld, from a story by Marc Hyman. Produced by Robert De Niro, Jay Roach, Jane Rosenthal. Executive produced by Amy Sayres, Nancy Tennenbaum. Original music, Randy Newman. Cinematography, John Schwartzman. Editors, Alan Baumgarten, Jon Poll. Production design, Rusty Smith. Costumes, Carol Ramsey. Starring Robert De Niro, Ben Stiller, Dustin Hoffman, Barbra Streisand, Blythe Danner and Teri Polo. With Owen Wilson, Alanna Ubach, Ray Santiago, Tim Blake Nelson and Shelley Berman. Universal Pictures, 2004. PG-13. 114 minutes.

Based on the trailers, I had successfully avoided seeing *Meet the Fockers* for several weeks. But now, in mid-January, with no sign of the rest of the best of 2004 in sight, I succumbed, dragging myself into the theater on a Monday afternoon and settling in to be bummed. I call this condition: zero expectations.

But I find I have fallen in love with Dustin Hoffman's perfect film persona of a lively but mellow hippie (*I Heart Huckabees*), who's delighted to discover aging doesn't mean not having fun. In a film with abundant onscreen talent such as *Meet the Fockers*, Hoffman as Bernie Focker steals the show right out from under the comic grasp of Robert De Niro, Ben Stiller and Barbra Streisand. And he does it by being an absolutely lovable dad and husband.

As Roz Focker, Streisand shares a warmth and earthiness that hasn't always been evident in her long career. She's relaxed and plainspoken, not trying to suck up all the good air in the room. Still beautiful and sexy, Streisand exercises her not so subtle flair for comedy here.

As Jack Byrnes, the former CIA spook who's keeping his eyes on potential bridegroom Greg Focker (Ben Stiller), De

Niro is as reluctant as ever to crack a smile or give an inch. He's outfitted a new mobile home with a secret control room so he can watch everything that goes on in the Fockers' household during the get-the-parents-together weekend. Jack's wife, Dina (Blythe Danner), is beginning to chafe at his antics. He dotes on their older daughter's son, little Jack, to an unhealthy degree, and he mostly ignores Dina.

The Byrnes's experience the Fockers differently. Dina likes Roz, and she enjoys Bernie's hugs and good humor. She has to verbally remind Jack to cool it when his pinched face discloses his obvious distaste for the behavior of Greg, Roz and Bernie. Jack clings to his belief that Greg will finally expose the skeletons in the family closet. But Dina and Jack's daughter, Pam (Teri Polo), has a secret of her own, and many of the predictable kinks in the movie turn on who knows and who doesn't.

Greg, who's a nurse, finally gets fed up with being bullied about by Jack. Caught in the middle between the Byrnes and the Fockers, Greg has to front off an unforgivably awkward scene, in which he tells the assembled engagement party true tales best left untold. It's the worst scene in the film, actually — not funny, just embarrassing.

While the plot is less important than the performances, it is gratifying in these post-election days to see Floridians such as Bernie and Roz depicted as old liberals. Of course the Fockers should be living in a hip city in a blue state on the West Coast, such as Eugene, where they'd fit right in. Roz is a geriatric sex therapist, the author of a book called *Is Your Vagina Happy?* while Bernie's a former attorney now into peaceful martial arts and cooking. He was a stay-at-home dad with Greg, and is still dotty about the son he calls by his middle name, "Gaylord."

Near the end of the picture, Greg, Bernie and Jack are arrested by an uptight Officer Le Fore (Tim Blake Nelson), who doesn't give a fig if stuffed shirt Jack is

a retired CIA man. Later, Judge Ira (played by comic Shelley Berman), sends his love to "Sugarpants," aka Roz, for saving his marriage. *That* impresses Jack.

Now playing at Cinemark and Cinema World, *Meet the Fockers* deserves to be seen with zero expectations. **EW**



It's all in the family, as gregarious Bernie (Dustin Hoffman) smooches grim Jack (Robert De Niro).

UNIVERSAL PICTURES, 2005.



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6a – 9A The Morning Sedition: Mark Riley and Marc Maron serve a healthy dollop of absurdity on top and a side order of subversion.



9A – 12P The Al Franken Show: This is the show that takes the fight against the conservatives to the airwaves! Al and co-host Katherine Lanpher deliver daily irreverent commentary, comedy and interviews.

Noon-3pm UnFiltered: Co-hosted by The Daily Show co-creator Lizz Winstead, Chuck D, leader and co-founder of legendary rap group Public Enemy, and Rachel Maddow, a rabble-rousing broadcaster with a doctorate in politics from the University of Oxford. This uncompromising program puts politics and culture through the wringer, uncensored and unfiltered.



3P – 7P The Randi Rhodes Show: Randi's legendary South Florida talk show (WIOD/Miami and WJNO/West Palm) is the PMD anchor for AM 990. The program features commentary, interviews, call-ins and Randi's trademark candor. Randi is one of the first female political talk show hosts in the country.





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