



Chowder and DJ check out their adversary.

Hungry Home

There goes the neighborhood.

MONSTER HOUSE: Directed by Gil Kenan. Screenplay by Dan Harmon, Rob Schrab and Pamela Pettler. Executive producers, Steven Spielberg and Robert Zemeckis. With the voices of Mitchel Musso, Sam Lerner, Spencer Locke, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Jon Heder, Steve Buscemi, Jason Lee and Kathleen Turner. Columbia Pictures, 2006. PG. 91 minutes.

It's hard not to wonder who decided *Monster House* should be a summer movie. It begins the day before Halloween, with a deliciously crisp shot that follows a single leaf's descent onto the clipped lawn of a ramshackle house. Created with motion capture, a combination of live action and computer animation, the movie is bright but shadowed, rich with the colors of fall and ripe with the haunting notions kids get about the creepy house down the street. But here we are in the middle of summer, and seasonal incongruity isn't *Monster House*'s only weakness.

Twelve-year-old DJ (Mitchel Musso), whose head of snap-on Lego hair seems to weigh down his spindly body, has a feeling about the run-down house across the street. Neighborhood crankpot Mr. Nebbercracker (Steve Buscemi), all spidery limbs and bulbous nose, is notorious for chasing kids off his lawn, but DJ's noticed creepier things happening. Just before DJ's parents conveniently leave for the night, Nebbercracker has a nasty fall and is taken to the hospital. DJ's babysitter Zee (Maggie Gyllenhaal, always a lively presence) is distracted by her doofy boyfriend, Bones (Jason Lee). The time is ripe for exploring.

Alas, if only the house had much of an interior to explore. After a series of false starts, DJ, his friend Chowder (Sam Lerner) and

smart-cookie candy saleswoman Jenny (Spencer Locke), whom the house had intended to have as an afternoon snack, make their way inside. For a few tense moments, *Monster House* seems as if it might pick up the pace after its leisurely first half. It does, slightly, but the excitement feels hollow, like the amusement park ride the film has already been compared to. You go in, you ooh and aah briefly at the effects, which are at times spooky and inspired, and you know, the whole time, that everyone on the ride will come out the other side just fine. It's a strange line for a film with tween characters to walk — very scary at points (possibly too much so for small kids), but unwilling to put anything real at stake in a way that would make the adventure more meaningful.

Director Gil Kenan takes a keen interest in the monstrous house's effective, evil anthropomorphism: Windows stand in for eyes, broken slats of wood for teeth, a long carpet for a tongue and Kathleen Turner for its personality. Turner, like the rest of the cast, even those in minor roles, is stellar. Steve Buscemi is note-perfect as crotchety old man Nebbercracker; as Zee's stoner boyfriend, Jason Lee speaks with a gleeful tinge of old-school Keanu Reeves; Jon Heder (*Napoleon Dynamite*) gets a giggle as the local videogame champion (at a game called Thou Art Dead) and keeper of obscure paranormal knowledge. Each character has a moment or two where he or she elevates *Monster House* above the average moderately charming animated feature, but, like the leaf settling on the house's lawn, it doesn't stay afloat too long. **EW**

Monster House opens Friday, July 21 at Cinemark & Cinema World.

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Clerks II: Eminently quotable writer-director Kevin Smith returns to the mini-mart clerks with which his career began. Randal (Jeff Anderson) and Dante (Brian O'Halloran) face fast food jobs, grown-up matters and, of course, endless geek-centric debates. R. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties: Bill Murray returns as the voice of the once-somewhat-classic Garfield, who follows his owner Jon (Breckin Meyer) to London. Some kind of mad cat switcheroo ensues with a high-falutin' royal feline named Prince. PG. Movies 12. **Idiot, The:** Reading and film series focusing on Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Vladimir Bortko's adaptation of the text. Seventh reading and episode July 20; eighth reading and episode July 25; ninth reading and episode July 27: 7 pm film, 8 pm discussion each night. 142 Law, UO.

Lady in the Water: Paul Giamatti (*Sideways*) plays a building superintendent who finds, in the building's pool, a creature called a "narf" (seriously) who needs to get back to her world. Supposedly, the first film from writer-director M. Night Shyamalan (*The Sixth Sense*) to not hinge on a plot twist. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Monster House: Three kids face off against a creepy neighborhood house that's something other than haunted. With the voices of Maggie Gyllenhaal, Steve Buscemi and Jon Heder. PG. Cinema World. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**

My Super Ex-Girlfriend: Matt (Luke Wilson) breaks up with his needy girlfriend Jenny (Uma Thurman) only to find she's got superpowers. And she's going to use them against him. Because women are crrrrrazy! PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas: Animated pirate adventure tale stars the voice of Brad Pitt as Sinbad, Catherine Zeta-Jones as Marina and Michelle Pfeiffer as the goddess of chaos. Joe Fiennes plays Proteus, a rival pirate. PG. Plays only at 10 am July 25 at Movies 12.

Thank You for Smoking: Jason Reitman (the son of director Ivan Reitman) directs Aaron Eckhart and a strong supporting cast in this sharp-eyed, satirical look at the tobacco industry. R. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Union Man, A: The Life and Work of Julius Margolin: The story of New York City labor activist Julius Margolin, active since the 1930s. Since 1999, Margolin has been making music as well as organizing workers. Plays at DIVA at 7:30 pm July 21 with concert and Q & A. \$5-\$10 sug. don. **Wordplay:** Bill Clinton, Jon Stewart and Yankees pitcher Mike Mussina are among those proclaiming their love for the *New York Times* crossword puzzle in this winning doc, which focuses on puzzle master Will Shortz and the competitors in an annual crossword tournament. Likely one of the best films of the year. PG. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

CONTINUING:

Break-Up, The: Jennifer Aniston and Vince Vaughn star in the latest from director Peyton Reed (*Bring It On*) as a Chicago pair who apparently aren't very good at breaking up. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Cars: The animation wizards at Pixar (*Toy Story*, *Finding Nemo*) team up with Disney for the story of a rookie race car (voiced by Owen Wilson) taking an unexpected detour on his way to a big race. Bonnie Hunt and Paul Newman also voice characters. G. Cinemark. Cinema World. **Online archives.** **Click:** Christopher Walken gives Adam Sandler a truly universal remote: it lets him put the wife on fast forward, put the boss on pause, help the kid get even ... until the remote goes all TiVo on him and starts making decisions on its own. PG-13. Cinemark.

Devil Wears Prada, The: Meryl Streep stars as demanding, high-powered fashion magazine editor Miranda Priestley, whose new assistant (Anne Hathaway) is fresh from college and totally clueless about fashion. Based on Lauren Weisberger's best-selling novel. PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

District B13: A talented cop and a street-smart vigilante team up to save a walled-in ghetto from destruction in the latest film from producer/writer Luc Besson (*The Fifth Element*). Predictable but enjoyable story is lifted by the striking physical presence of leads David Belle and Cyril Raffaelli. R. Bijou LateNite. **Online archives.**

Fast and the Furious, The: Tokyo Drift: The series gets a new star in Lucas Black (*Friday Night Lights*), whose character moves to Japan and gets caught up in the underground world of drift racing. PG-13. Movies 12.

Ice Age 2: The Meltdown: Manny (Ray Romano), Sid (John Leguizamo) and Diego (Denis Leary) are back for another adventure. The animals are excited that the ice is melting — it's a paradise of water parks! But where is all that new water going to go? PG. Movies 12.

Inconvenient Truth, An: Following the 2000 election, Al Gore changed tack, turning his focus to the worldwide crisis that is global warming. Director Davis Guggenheim combines footage of Gore's traveling multimedia presentation on climate crisis with Gore's personal story, creating an effective and engaging film. PG. Bijou. **Online archives.**

Lake House, The: Kate (Sandra Bullock) and Alex (Keanu Reeves) are carrying on a correspondence through the mystical mailbox of a house on an Illinois lake — despite living in worlds that are two years apart. Time-challenged romance sounds kinda corny, but hey, Ebert and Roeper both liked it. PG-13. Cinemark.

Little Man: Director Keenen Ivory Wayans' new film follows a height-challenged thief (Marlon Wayans) who dresses up like a baby and gets himself adopted in order to recover a diamond. PG-13. Cinemark.

Mission Impossible 3: Can Tom Cruise dodge the mountains of press about his personal life — er, many guys with guns and explosives in

his way — and save the woman he loves from an impressively creepy Philip Seymour Hoffman? R. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest: Johnny Depp reprises his role as over-the-top swashbuckler Jack Sparrow in the second *Pirates* film, which we rather fervently hope is as entertaining as the first. Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley are the in-love eye candy — actually, it's a toss-up as to which of the three leads is prettiest. With Bill Nighy all betentacled as watery bad guy Davy Jones. PG-13. Cinemark. Cinema World. **Online archives.**

Poseidon: When a huge wave capsizes a luxury liner on New Year's Eve, a small group of passengers must fight for their lives. Josh Lucas, Jacinda Barrett, Kurt Russell and Richard Dreyfuss star in Wolfgang Petersen's (*Das Boot*) remake of *The Poseidon Adventure*. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

Princess Bride, The: Pirates, farm boys, princesses, rodents of unusual size, the six-fingered-man, and Cary Elwes before he started starring in things like *Saw*. Have fun storming the castle, and even more fun revisiting a time when romantic comedies were this good. PG. Bijou LateNite.

RV: In Barry Sonnenfeld's latest film, Robin Williams tells his family they're going on vacation to Hawaii — but instead packs his wife and kids into an RV and heads to Colorado. Jeff Daniels heads up a wacky bunch of full-time campers. It's a sure bet there are hijinks involved. PG-13. Movies 12.

Superman Returns: At long last, the man of steel returns to movie screens — and to Earth. In director Bryan Singer's new film, Superman's been gone five long years, during which his former flame Lois Lane has had a son and found a new fellow. Oh, and Lex Luthor is out of prison. Starring Brandon Routh as the man in tights, Kate Bosworth as Lois and Kevin Spacey as Lex. PG-13. Cinemark. **Online archives.**

Wild, The: Keifer Sutherland and Janeane Garofalo are among the actors voicing critters on a quest to rescue one of their own, who somehow got accidentally shipped off to the jungle. *Madagascar*, anyone? (William Shatner appears as a wicked wildebeest.) G. Movies 12.

X-Men: The Last Stand: The third X-Men movie combines the loved-by-fans "Dark Phoenix" storyline with the discovery of a "cure" for mutancy. Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry, Famke Janssen and the rest of the core cast return (sans Nightcrawler, oddly). Stay through the credits for a vital scene. PG-13. Movies 12. **Online archives.**

You, Me and Dupree: Kate Hudson and Matt Dillon star as a newly married couple whose new life together takes a sharp turn when perpetual bachelor Dupree (perpetual scene-stealer Owen Wilson) crashes at their place. But it's just for a little while. Right? PG-13. Cinema World. Cinemark.

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