

Film Review: One 'Vacation' You Don't Want to Take

By Kam Williams
For *The Skanner News*

National Lampoon's *Vacation* is an enduring film franchise launched back in 1978 by the late John Hughes, the brains behind such Chicago-centric screen classics as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *Planes, Trains & Automobiles*, *Home Alone*, *Uncle Buck* and *Baby's Day Out*, to name a few. The original *Vacation* adventure featured the Griswold family's very eventful road trip from the Windy City to L.A.

This nostalgic seventh installment not only resurrects Walley World amusement park as its destination point, but has Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo reprising their iconic roles as Clark and Ellen Griswold, respectively. However, the couple's been reduced to a cameo appearance in favor of a plot revolving around their son Rusty's (Ed Helms) nuclear family.

At the point of departure, we find Rusty sorely in need of a break from the rat race as an overworked pilot for a budget airline carrier. He

plans to both spice up his stale marriage and spend some quality time with his sons during the drive across the country. Of course, the highway gods have other ideas in mind, as the perils lying in wait range from robbery to raw sewage.

My biggest problem with this relatively-salacious episode rests in its often-offensive obsession with sexuality. For example, when younger son Kevin (Steele Stebbins) asks, "Dad, what's a pedophile?" he is inappropriately informed, "It's when a man and a boy love each other very much." It doesn't help that the kid subsequently encounters a "glory hole" in a rest stop bathroom ostensibly cruised by gay men.

There is a homophobic tone cast over the entire picture, notably present in Kevin's relentless bullying of his effeminate big brother, James (Skyler Gisondo). The mean-spirited mistreatment includes teasing his sibling about "having a vagina" and choking him with a plastic bag.

Even the boy's father piles on periodically, like when he suggests that Kevin



Chevy Chase (second from right) and Beverly D'Angelo (right) reprise their original roles in *Vacation*, the seventh outing in the franchise that started in 1978. The new film stars Christina Applegate (left), Ed Helms (second from left, as grown-up Rusty), Skyler Gisondo and Steele Stebbins.

scratches "like a girl" when he fights.

Rusty's wife Debbie (Christina Applegate) isn't much of a role model either, between overimbibing in a "Chug Run" during a pit stop and 'fessing up about having developed a bad reputation in college for show-

ing her breasts to anybody who asked. From full-frontal male nudity to an F-word laced theme song, *Vacation* is a cringe-inducing disappointment that bears little resemblance to the original it so desperately endeavors to pay homage to.

Fair ★

Rated R for brief male frontal nudity, sexuality, crude humor, mature themes and pervasive profanity

Running time: 99 minutes

Distributor: Warner Brothers Pictures



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