

Sequel should shag Powers' lovers, baby

Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Two years ago, *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*, a low-budget sleeper, was panned by most critics (but not by me).

On its own, the \$54 million film built enough of a cult following to warrant a sequel. The multi-talented Mike Meyers (*Saturday Night Live* and *Wayne's World*) wrote, produced and starred as both hero and villain in his irreverent send-up of James Bond flicks.

For the uninitiated, Austin Powers is a time-traveling, British secret agent who masquerades as a swinging photographer but is actually

an ever-vigilant defender of Earth against the forces of evil.

Relying on Benny Hill-style double entendres and set against the backdrop of the gaudiest of mod era's offerings, Powers spews a lewd shag-speak that the '60s never really knew.

Again Meyers collaborated again with Jay Roach, who made his directorial debut with the original *Austin Powers*.

They did it again. Austin Powers is back in all his obnoxiousness. For once we can actually say, 'the sequel is better, despite the high expectations.'

This go round, Meyers

again plays the title character and his arch enemy, the infamous Dr. Evil. But he is almost unrecognizable, and perhaps funniest, in a third role as Fat Bastard, a flabalanche of a henchman of the doctor's.

While there isn't a scene that doesn't include Meyers, the expansive, star-studded supporting cast includes sicko voyeur Jerry Springer, aging teenthrob Rob Lowe, aging leading man Robert Wagner, aged country crooner Willie Nelson, perennial Hugh Grant fiancée Elizabeth Hurley, character actor Michael York, balladeer Burt Bacharach, musical oddity Elvis Costello, hemp

advocate Woody Harrelson, super-model Rebecca Romain Stamos and Susan Sarandon common-law Tim Robbins.

The point of departure is 1999, Austin's honeymoon, where he discovers that his bride, Vanessa (Hurley), is a fembot, a female robot. Vanessa turns on him, bullets blazing out of her bra.

Cut to the Jerry Springer Show where Scott Evil (Seth Green) spills his guts on a segment themed, "My dad is evil and wants to take over the world."

Even though Scott's Dad, Dr. Evil, had been banished to the far reaches of the universe in his Bob's Big Boy

rocket ship, you can pretty well guess that his reemergence is imminent. In fact, he shows up right on the set and pandemonium breaks out.

It is well worth the price of admission just to see Jerry finally get beat in one of those scuffles he provokes.

Powers, meanwhile, now free to date, flirts shamelessly and incessantly, but sets his sights on a few love interests along his merry way, including: Ivana Humpalot (Kristen Johnston of 3rd Rock From the Sun), Robin Swallows (Gia Carides) and Felicity Shagwell (Heather Graham). But duty calls when he learns that Dr. Evil is

indeed back with a plan to destroy earth by turning the moon into a death star.

Dr. Evil and his unusual assortment of miscreants steal the show, including the aforementioned Fat Bastard, No. 2, the diminutive Minime (a one-eighth replica of Dr. Evil), Mustafa (the immortal assassin) and the severe Frau Farbissina.

Laugh after laugh after laugh, this is the Funniest movie since "There's Something About Mary."

Excellent (4 stars) Rated PG-13 for cartoonish violence, inky double entendres and slapstick sex.

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'Phantom' menaced by shabby plot, weak dialogue

Tammy D. McMahan
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I wanted to find out: As a confirmed *Star Wars* fanatic, can a fanatic provide a fair review of a *Star Wars* film.

Yes. *Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* greatly disappointed me. The film lacks heart and soul. Even the special effects — a sort of visual overkill — left me unsatisfied.

The story begins with Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and his apprentice Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) on their way to negotiations with the Trade Federation which has set up a blockade hindering trade.

The negotiations never take place. The Jedi soon realize that the blockade is just one part of a scheme to invade and rule the planet Naboo and, perhaps, the rest of the galaxy.

The Jedi steal aboard a Federation ship and land on Naboo. Here, they encounter

a clumsy, cowardly Gungan named Jar Jar Binks and Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman).

As the invasion forces quickly move upon the planet, the Jedi, Jar Jar, and the queen and her entourage flee to the planet Coruscant so the queen may plead her case to the Senate.

On the way to Coruscant, the refugees are forced to land on the planet Tatooine.

There, they meet young Anakin Skywalker a slave boy who seems to have the makings of a great Jedi. The refugees and Anakin return to Naboo to fight the Federation invaders.

Many critics have criticized *The Phantom Menace* for its clunky direction, storyline and dialogue and lack of compelling characters and acting. I've joined their club.

Surprisingly, the film begins with a rather boring view of a spaceship in space.

There is none of the wow and wonder of seeing that humongous star destroyer fill the screen as it did in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, the 1977 film.

The middle sequence concerning the petition to the Senate was stupefyingly boring. If I wanted to see mind-numbing discussions on politics, I'd watch C-Span. The scenes involving the Jedi Council were yawners.

The Council, even the lovable, enigmatic Yoda, seemed like a group of scotchety people who like to sit around with steepled fingers and spout mysterious predictions. Think of them as a galactic board of directors.

The dialogue is too formal, dull and void of humor, compassion, fear or any other heartfelt emotion.

The characters were one dimensional. The actors weren't given much to work with and it shows in their performances.

Liam Neeson sleepwalks through the action as Qui-Jon. Try as he might to breathe life into Obi-Wan, Ewan McGregor can only show us mere flashes of fire and wit.

Natalie Portman is, at times, interesting, but mostly wooden. Jake Lloyd is in that group of child actors who subscribe to the adorable, feisty "moppet" method of performing. If you blink,

you'll miss Samuel L. Jackson's appearance on screen. Furthermore, you'll see more of Darth Maul (Ray Park) at some fast-food places, than you'll see of him in this film.

Lucas went overboard on the special effects. The special effects in the first film weren't especially spectacular, but the story and characters were immensely

engaging. The visual overkill in this film takes away from the characters and the action.

Despite the bad "buzz" that I had heard about this film, I was eager to see it and I'll bet that you are too.

If you like it, good for you.

If you're disappointed, keep your hopes up that the second film in this prequel will blow your socks off.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Kimberly Edwards

The red-suited Delfonics also performed at the House of Blues.

R & B

(Continued from Page 9) GoRound", "You Make Me Feel Brand New" and "Betcha By Golly Wow."

Between gracious thank you's to the audience and gentlemanly bows, the Stylistics, all three being

original band members, told us that they were celebrating 31 years together.

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