Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End


Date of review: Thursday 24th May, 2007

Director: Gore Verbinski
Duration: 168 minutes
Classification: M
We rate it: Two stars.

Sadly, Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End proves that the “third time lucky” adage doesn’t hold true when Hollywood producers are trying to make lightning strike the same spot once again. Lightning certainly struck in 2003, when the original Pirates of the Caribbean film was released. Despite the fact that many cinemagoers were dubious about a film based on a Disneyland ride, Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl hit the spot, and then some. A stellar cast (led by the astonishing Johnny Depp playing his pirate captain Jack Sparrow as Keith Richards) swash and buckled its way through a wonderfully entertaining plot, while the best CGI wizards money could buy contributed eye-popping visual effects that managed to help tell the story without overwhelming it. I for one could not believe that such a gleefully entertaining and witty film could have been concocted from a fun-ride, and I left the cinema, as so many punters did, on that bubble-gum high that only great big Hollywood experiences can provide.

The inevitable sequel, Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest (2006) was, in my opinion, as spectacularly unsuccessful as the first film was wondrously entertaining. As I remember saying at the time, the second film absolutely collapsed under the weight of its own disorderly spectacle, and what the producers and director clearly intended as mile-a-minute effects-driven entertainment ended up being an incomprehensible, long-winded mess. As disorderly and overblown as the original was humourous and well-structured, Pirates II left a tremendously disappointing taste in one’s mouth, and over the last few months many of us have been desperately hoping that the third film in the franchise would undo some of the damage done by number two.

Sadly, this hasn’t happened. Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End is, if anything, even more overblown, confused and chaotic than its immediate predecessor. One of the primary problems is that director Gore Verbinski (who handled both the previous

instalments) is here trying to juggle so much utterly unnecessary plot information that the first two hours of the film have to function as elaborately long-winded setup for the final act, which, when it finally arrives, is comprised of one of those infuriatingly extended CGI battle scenes that, despite one or two amazing set-pieces, is so self-indulgent and over-the-top that after a while it becomes supremely boring. Where the first film worked on two main plot threads (the curse on the pirates and the love-subplot between Will and Elizabeth), here we have so many that it’s difficult to list them all in the space available here. Just as a taste: we have another curse-lifting plot (this time involving Will’s father, Bill Turner, played by Stellan Skaarsgard, who’s under so much prosthetic makeup that it’s hard, and indeed stomach-churning, to look at him); we have the ongoing “secondary-villain” narrative involving Davy Jones (Bill Nighy, ditto for the makeup); a third villain, Tom Hollander’s nasty East India naval chief; a subplot involving Naomie Harris’ mysterious Tia Dalma; relationship problems between Will and Elizabeth; the continuing rivalry between captains Barbosa and Sparrow; the dread meeting of the nine Pirate Captains, including Jack, Chow Yun-Fat and many others in glorified cameos; the lifting of Jack’s curse and the removal of him from Davy Jones’ clutches, and at least three other plot threads that I am too exhausted to attempt to recollect. With this barrage of information being inelegantly thrust at the audience for the first two hours of the film, it’s no wonder that so many of us found the experience utterly frustrating.

Sadly, this third Pirates film confirms the feeling that the producers really should have left well enough alone. The idea that a good thing can only be repeated by tripling it in size, cost and complexity has been officially called into question, in my opinion. My verdict on this film: stay home, put the first Pirates movie into your DVD player, close the doors, take the phone off the hook, and try to forget numbers two and three were made at all. Despite a couple of side-splitting moments with Johnny’s brilliant performance as Jack, this third film only serves to remind us just how good the first one really was.

Nick Prescott