

Morton Marcus: The summer so far

Sentinel Staff Report

Article Launched: 06/23/2007 3:00:00 AM PDT

So you've seen the three earliest arrivals of this summer's blockbuster films, those already record-breaking sequels of sequels, "Spider-Man 3," "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End," and "Shrek The Third" Besides liking or disliking them, do you think they are good or bad? And on what do you base your opinions? I use the following guidelines: I always hope films professing to be nothing more than popular art, the people's art, will meet.

In addition to entertaining, they should be intelligent, mentally and emotionally stimulating, have lively dialogue, and be built on the foundations of our cultural roots, which, whether we are aware of them or not, draw on our collective ideals and values and therefore reference — allude to — more than the media world of the last 20 or 30 years.

So I tried to ignore the bloated plot of "Spider-Man 3" and concentrate on our hero's interior war with his dark side, which almost costs him his sanity and Mary Jane's love. This Freudian allusion has real possibilities. But it is immediately rendered ridiculous in the film because it is not the result of self-awareness but of Spider-Man's being infected — really invaded — by a black blob from outer space. Then again, this "dark side" motif has too many shades of "Star Wars," and shows, along with the rest of the film's baggage, that it is trying too hard to be "significant" Unfortunately, even the dialogue, which is used to explain the film's convoluted goings-on, is flat and uninteresting. All in all, "Spider-Man 3" takes its comic book world, without alluding to anything besides "Star Wars," far too seriously.

The latest "Pirates of the Caribbean" venture is worse. Like "Spider-Man," it is stuffed with plot, which gets so entangled that one wonders what's going on. By this third offering, the supernatural elements of the first two films have become so woven into the storyline that there is no way to identify with the characters on a realistic let alone emotional level. Characters die and are brought back to life, everyone's betraying everyone else, and, tellingly, there's very little humor: Jack Sparrow mutters some incomprehensible puns, but mostly the dialogue is flat, the mood of the film brooding and melancholic, and this time around the CGI is not in the service of stunts but elaborate set designs that promote mood more than storyline. Even the film's allusions to pirate lore are so twisted out of shape as to be sheer fabrications. The most interesting aspect of this mish-mash is the subtext that shows the pirates — who describe themselves as "free men," and are represented by all races and nationalities — pitted in an Armageddon-like battle against the East India Company, which surely represents today's multinational corporate world.

The delightful surprise of the three films is "Shrek The Third" Although the plot is rife with subplots, the main storyline is clear: Shrek is on a journey to secure a new king for Far Far Away. Along the way, he is embroiled in various adventures. So as far as allusions are concerned, the plot is built on the classic schematic of epics like the "Odyssey" and the hero quest stories of fairy tales. Some of the side trips are clearly archetypal as well, but they are made fresh by being turned on their heads and satirized, such as the spoof of current American high school social life seen as a Hogwarts-like training ground for the heroes of Arthurian romances. In another subplot, several dozen fairy tale villains band together to take over Far Far Away. All of this is cleverly done, and the dialogue, composed of one-liners and sharp repartee, is witty and hilarious by turns. So quick are the one-liners that the film is reminiscent of a 1930s Marx Brothers film and should be seen twice to get the full measure of them. To put it simply, this film is popular culture at its best.

Contact Morton Marcus at
wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com.



\$ \$ \$ \$
 Down Payment Security Deposit 1st mo. Payment Due at Signing

Lease a new Civic LX
(click here for lease terms)

FIND A DEALER
ENTER ZIP SUBMIT SoCal Dealers helpful

Featured Links

Marketplace

- [Find a Rental](#)
- [Find a Business](#)
- [Find Stuff](#)

Sponsored Links

- [Alternative Cancer Treatment Clinic](#)
- [Attorney Finder Lawyer Search](#)
- [Aupairs & nannies available](#)
- [Stem Cell Medicine](#)
- [Alternative Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Sea Logix Pharmaceutical Grade Fish Oil](#)

- Get Grocery Coupons
- **Special Sections**
- Newspaper in Education
- SantaCruz PHOTOGALLERY
- Sentinel Triathlon
- Santa Cruz Live
- TV Schedule
- Bridesmaid Dresses
- Cellit Mobile Marketing
- Chrysler
- corporate awards
- Debt Management
- Diamond Rings
- Internet Auctions
- Magic Love Spells
- Moving Companies, Movers
- Personal Loan
- Reverse Osmosis Water Softener
- Vacation Home Rentals
- yellow pages
- Support our Troops
- Credit Help Resource
- Santa Cruz Real Estate
- Free on-line dating: Deception services
- Moving Companies
- Online Degrees
- Isagenix
- 2009 Calendars
- Property South France
- Apartment Amsterdam
- Property Provence
- Property Provence