

Steve Carrell, Paul Rudd Serve ‘Dinner for Schmucks’

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The third of the Steve Carrell Seasonal Movie Trilogy debuts with the uneven but absurd comedy “Dinner for Schmucks.” Paul Rudd, now the go-to actor for straight-man-yuppie-turned-wild-dude joins a strong cast, including the ubiquitous Zach Galifianakis, Jemaine Clement (“Flight of the Concorde”), and Bruce Greenwood.

Paul Rudd portrays Tim, an up-and-coming financial analysis who risks humiliation in an important meeting in the company’s executive suite, and through that risk convinces his boss Lance Fender (Bruce Greenwood) to take a chance on his ability to bring in an important and wealthy client (David Williams as Mueller). To do this, though, there is one more important test – to find a schmuck or idiot to bring to Fender’s dinner table, so that he and his boardroom can amuse themselves through the idiocy presented.

After being informed of the plan, Tim’s comely girlfriend Julie (Stephanie Szostak) condemns the dinner, and Tim fears she will now fall into the arms of the artist she represents, Kieran (Jemaine Clement). While contemplating this dilemma in the car, Tim literally runs into Barry (Steve Carrell), who was in the street retrieving a taxidermy-style stuffed mouse. Barry’s hobby of creating scenes with the stuffed mice is seemingly perfect for Tim’s upcoming business dinner for schmucks. If only he can keep it from Julie.



When Barry shows up a day early for the dinner, he begins to cause problems in Tim’s life. An errand computer message he receives, for

example, conjures one of Tim's stalkers named Darla (Lucy Punch) and her infiltration of Tim's situation, both with Julie and his business contacts, causes elements of both relationships to unravel. Barry's awkward attempts to help Tim get Julie back leads to a mind control IRS agent name Therman (Zach Galifianakis), and a seat at the table when the dinner is served.

Directed by Jay Roach of "Meet the Parents," this film is based on a French farce called "La Diner de Cons' [1998], and its roots in that country's sense of absurdity are fairly evident. The opening credits, using The Beatle's "Fool on the Hill" to perfection, shows Barry's stuffed mice in various poses, each becoming more elaborate and surreal as the camera exposes them. This sequence almost seems separate from the rest of the film, until the dinner itself gets into high gear.

Steve Carrell does a slight variation on his Michael Scott character from "The Office" in the guise of Barry, and because of that similarity the overall persona is a bit tiresome, and the script doesn't do him any favors. He doesn't seem connected to Rudd's Tim in a crucial warm or comedic way, but all indications in the dialogue and action want him to be. It is a character, through its ridiculous nature, that can go in any direction at any time, and that is not a strength. Also director Roach takes his time setting up some of the bits, and there are long stretches with little happening.

Surrounding him is a collection of varied performances, starting with Rudd's familiar flummoxed "every dude" as seen in "Role Models" and "I Love you Man." As noted, the chemistry between he and Carrell is tenuous, but he keeps a grip on his role as the story representative – it is about him – and follows through to the expectation of the dinner. In essence, he does what is expected and delivers.

It is the coterie of supporting schmucks that give the film some life and ultimately makes the entire meal worth digesting. Lucy Punch's Darla is letter perfect, especially in the scene where she is asked to stand-in for Julie at an important business meeting (as set up by Barry). She uses her physical presence to uplift the insanity of the stalker portrayal, and mines some comic gold. Zach Galifianakis continues a winning streak of weirdness, and Therman will be part of an impressive character ability to create different variations from the same mold. Jemaine Clement flies from his "Concords" roots and has fun as an eccentric artist.



The Table is Set: The Gang Gathers for the Feasting in 'Dinner for Schmucks'
Photo Credit: Merie Weismiller Wallace for © 2010 DW Studios LLC

And gratefully the climax of the dinner itself doesn't disappoint. It mixes social class satire – the rich antagonists thinking they're better than the schmucks – with a mix of bizarro dinner guests that would have Federico Fellini noting the place cards. Blind swordsman, anyone?

Grab the invitation to participate, access your inner schmuck and sit down with some mindless summer fun. Just make sure that when before-meal grace is offered, that a request for more time between Steve Carrell movies is prominent. It's best not to stuff one's self.

"Dinner for Schmucks" opens in everywhere July 30th. Featuring Steve Carrell, Paul Rudd, Zach Galifianakis, Jemaine Clement, Bruce Greenwood, Lucy Punch, Stephanie Szostak, Ron Livingston, Larry Wilmore and Kristen Schaal. Screenplay by David Guion and Michael Handelman, directed by Jay Roach. Rated "PG-13"



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