

‘Puss in Boots’ Coasts Through Familiar Animated Antics

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Animated family films have made a pact with their audience. For our participation – and extra 3D glasses fee – they deliver the latest in computer generated eye candy, familiar voice talent and heroes that always win while making pop culture references. Antonio Banderas is “Puss in Boots.”

Expanding on the feline swashbuckler from the “Shrek” series of films, “Puss in Boots” is a decent exercise of the animated pact, but doesn’t offer anything new or particular exciting. The generated atmosphere is gorgeous, truly a miracle of the modern age, but the filmmakers probably think this is enough. It took four writers to sweat out the adventurous screenplay, only to fall back on litter box jokes and a greek chorus cat who offers the oh-no-you-didn’t aphorism.

Set before his Shrek adventures, Puss in Boots (voice of Banderas) is introduced in all his roguish ways, loving and leaving his feline companion. He hears rumors about magic beans, being held by the grown-up Jack (Billy Bob Thorton) and Jill (Amy Sedaris). When he goes to steal them, he is outmaneuvered by a masked thief named Kitty Softpaws (Salma Hayek). They decide that teaming up is better than working apart, and they set off anew to steal the beans.



Puss (voice of Antonio Banderas) and Kitty Softpaws (Salma Hayek) in ‘Puss in Boots’
Photo credit: Dreamworks Animation

Puss comes upon his hometown, and the orphanage where he grew up. In flashbacks, we meet Humpty Dumpty (Zach Galifianakis), once the closest friend of Puss, who ended up betraying him. The egg man holds the key to the power of the magic beans, which naturally grows a

climbable vine that reaches to the land of the giants. Humpty knows there is a goose that lays golden eggs there, and joins Puss and Softpaws in stealing the beans from Jack and Jill. When they finally procure them, golden eggs and retribution is next.

There is action and adventure in this movie, more than the comic overtones of the Shrek series. The fights, chases and dance-offs are carefully choreographed, with witty shades of 1960s spaghetti westerns thrown in. The computer generated landscape is flawless, now so well-rendered as to be taken for granted. The deserts, villages, magic vine surfing and the land of the giants are awe inducing, but since the story isn’t all that inspiring, the same atmosphere sometimes slipped into commonality once it was established.

The voice talent has fun – animated voiceover is the easiest payday in the business – although some of the celebrities sound so generic the production could have saved money hiring any voice. Zach Galifianakis proves again that if he plays a “character” outside his established show business persona, he doesn’t come off as well. His Humpty Dumpty is bland, and relies more on his comical look than the performance. It came off a bit scrambled.

There are a couple indications that the story wasn’t a priority. Multiple story consultants – there were four – is a red flag for trouble in a big production. They also padded the 90 minutes with a long dance-off and crazy chases that exist to show off the animation, but obviously is elaboration. And the whole fairy tale universe that Shrek parodied for four films only leaves scraps in “Puss in Boots.”



Humpty Dumpty (Zach Galifianakis) and Puss in ‘Puss in Boots’
Photo credit: Dreamworks Animation

The film has its moments, plus Banderas and Hayek are perfectly charming. The kids might get a bit bored with the padding and stretched-out story line, but the scenic eye candy might also burn a hole later in the DVD player. There are tons of family films now, literally a new animated epic every month. With the crowded marketplace, the “Law of Diminishing Returns” is bound to be a factor, and “Puss in Boots” wrestles with the law probably without knowing it.

Make the checklist and bring the kids. Celebrity voices, the Shrek seal of approval, funny-looking fairy tale characters and the 3D option. If it provides 90 minutes of time-killing in the midst of our quiet desperation, then it’s fun for the whole family.

“Puss in Boots” opens everywhere October 28th. See theater listings or 3D show times. Featuring the voices of Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek, Zach Galifianakis, Billy Bob Thornton and Amy Sedaris. Written by Brian Lynch, David H. Steinberg, Tom Wheeler and Jon Zack. Directed by Chris Miller. Rated “PG”



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