Hilarious 'Starbuck' Reinvents the Family Film

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on March 30, 2013 - 11:38am

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Rating: **4.0**/5.0

CHICAGO – "You'll believe a man can have 533 children" might be a better tagline than, "You'll believe a man can fly." The extremely funny new Canadian film "Starbuck" will not only make you a true believer, but also loudly professes a romantic and gooey refrain that is sometimes necessary in a cold, cynical world.

Right off the bat, "Starbuck" is a really funny film, even in a movie universe burnt out by the definition of funny. It takes the absurdist premise that youthful donations to a fertility clinic results in several hundred children, and riffs on it until virtually any commentary in the film regarding it produces a good laugh. It is also eventually and unabashedly sentimental about the whole scenario, and that might be a bit cloying, but the film earns the right by setting up the laughs beforehand. For hilarity and heart, this is the movie choice to represent the spring season of renewal.

David (Patrick Huard) is a hard luck loser. At 42 years old, he has several failed business ventures and is 80,000 dollars in debt, plus he is threatened by those debt collectors and forced back as a delivery driver in his father's meat-packing business. Even the simplest of tasks, getting soccer jerseys for his club team, is beyond the realm of his limited attention span. His on-and-off again girlfriend, Valérie (Julie LeBreton), also informs his that she is pregnant with his child, which leads to another round of sad sack destiny.

Father's Day: David (Patrick Huard) Contemplates His Fate in 'Starbuck'
Photo credit: Entertainment One

The world turns upside down when a lawyer informs David that he is being sued in class action suit to reveal his identity. It seems that he

made several deposits in a sperm bank 22 years earlier, and the "strength" of his baby juice led the unscrupulous clinic to use it for hundreds of clients. Of the 533 successful births that came out of him, 142 are suing to find out his identity, behind the ironic nickname he had submitted for himself, "Starbuck." His hapless lawyer friend Avocat (Antoine Bertrand) takes up his defense, and his life and the lives involved are about to be significantly changed as a result.

This is a film that produces laughs from an impossible but probable premise, given the modern fertility business. It gets to the point in the movie that whenever any character says something about the situation, its absurdity is guffaw inducing. When the secret is first revealed, it seems like every other line of dialogue is hysterical, especially with the laconic actor Patrick Huard ping-ponging against his John Belushi-like lawyer, portrayed to perfection by a very funny Antoine Bertrand.

Most intriguing is the use of a device to plot the movie. The lawyer representing the class action suit drops off a huge envelope of Starbuck's children, and David explores them in secret by throwing a dart at a huge wall of the profiles, and then turning them around to reveal who is who. It turns out he's fathered a soccer star, an actor, a goth guy, a recovering substance abuser, etc., and he infiltrates each of those lives secretly and becomes a self-described "guardian angel."

This is a situational comedy, so the laughs flow from the organic narrative. Julie LeBreton, as the girlfriend, is portrayed as somewhat shrewish, but she also has some of the better lines, and pops them off with the timing of a seasoned comedian. One of Starbuck's kids, Étienne (Patrick Martin as the goth kid), finds out David's secret early, and uses the information to develop an self-conscious but riotous attempt at father/son bonding.

How Many?: Avocat (Antoine Bertrand) Advises David in 'Starbuck'
Photo credit: Entertainment One

The film turns a bit gooey at the end, almost to the level of sentimental hogwash. But hell, when David's reasons for contributing to the clinic are revealed, it was set up instinctively. Some of the happy endings (no pun intended) could have been tempered a bit, but it wouldn't have been the same movie. Director and co-writer Ken Scott deserves everything he decided to give to Starbuck in the film, because he created such a funny premise to enjoy. There are also some leaps of logic, yet again there is nothing wrong with a bit of love and redemption around the vernal equinox.

"Starbuck" begs the the question, which came first, the rooster or the egg? If the prologue to the film is any indication, that would be the rooster. That's a cheap joke, but certainly in the spirit of this absurdist gem.

"Starbuck" continues its limited release in Chicago on March 29th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Patrick Huard, Julie LeBreton, Antoine Bertrand and Patrick Martin. Written by Ken Scott and Martin Petit. Directed by Ken Scott. Rated "R"

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