

New releases

Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol



★★★★★

(PG15) USA, 2011. Tom Cruise, Jeremy Renner, Paula Patton

In its towering scope and ambition it resembles Dubai's Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, which Tom Cruise infamously abseiled down during filming. But the fourth instalment of the *Mission: Impossible* franchise gets so tangled in its jigsaw puzzle of a plot that it barely scales the heights of a small skyscraper.

The film begins with a parody-like assassination scene in Budapest, before cutting to Ethan Hunt (Cruise) being broken out of a maximum-security Russian prison. 'Things must be bad out here, to get me out of there,' he quips. Bad they are; his mission, should he choose to accept it, involves breaking into Moscow's Kremlin to steal, well, something, before a terrorist gets there first. When it goes awry and the Russian fortress is blown up, Cruise's IMF team is blamed, forcing them to go AWOL to complete their (virtually) impossible mission.

While the Bond saga is trying to impersonate the gritty realism of the Bourne trilogy, in its fanatical stylings *M:I* is now playing catch-up to Bond. Specifically Pierce Brosnan's Bond: this movie's ensuing shambles of a storyline features a stolen satellite (recalling *Goldeneye*) and a fanatic's inexplicable desire to cause a nuclear war (*Tomorrow Never Dies*).

The spaghetti-hooped plot might befit the audience of director Brad

Bird's previous work – kids' movies *Ratatouille* and *The Incredibles* – but here it's little more than a cursory device to move from one thrilling set piece to another. It's exhilarating to watch a still-remarkably-fit Cruise dangling from the Burj Khalifa, but no one's really sure why he had to climb out of the window in the first place. How he ended up moments later in the midst of an impenetrable sandstorm in Satwa is little more convincing.

Perhaps sensing the self-parody it's in danger of becoming, the 'humour' is ramped up this time around. Brit funnyman Simon Pegg is promoted from a bit-part role in the last film to a grating movie-long script of one-liners and comic-book facial expressions. Meanwhile a barely necessary sub-plot about the death of Hunt's wife and introduction of new team member Brandt (Jeremy Renner) is dealt with in clown-like clumsiness. The finale in Mumbai – a nod to the original TV series, which sees Paul Patton's Jane seducing an Indian playboy before some blatant BMW product placement – sadly lacks the knockout punch of the second and third films.

Any franchise that reaches its fourth instalment has lost its ability to fire on all four cylinders, but as a popcorn-munching rollercoaster ride, this is entertaining enough. The film's open ending worryingly points towards a fifth film that may not achieve the same feat. *Rob Garratt*

You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger

★★★★★

(18+) USA, 2010. Josh Brolin, Anthony Hopkins, Naomi Watts

Woody Allen is in a virulent mood, and it suits him. This inspired piece of misanthropy is a London-set dissection of two unhappily married couples: Alfie (Hopkins) has taken up with call girl Charmaine (the spectacular Lucy Punch); his wife, Helena (Gemma Jones), is drowning her sorrows in psychic malarkey; their daughter, Sally (Watts), is smitten with her boss (Antonio Banderas); and her schlub husband, Roy (Brolin), is tempted by a new, alluring neighbour (Freida Pinto).

It's a typical Allen gaggle, yet there's a focus and precision to the paces he puts the group through. Why does the film feel so essential? Perhaps because of that tall, dark stranger lurking just outside the frame. It isn't



the first time death has figured in an Allen movie, but the way he grapples with it here is much more potent and direct. This love letter to the Reaper and his unknowable timetable is a bracing addition to an erratic, yet indispensable oeuvre. *Keith Uhlich*

The Muppets

★★★★★

(G) USA, 2011. Jason Segel, Amy Adams, Chris Cooper

The Muppets are in splitsville. Kermit, Miss Piggy et al packed up the M-Show theatre long ago and moved on to other gigs, but now the site is set for demolition at the hands of evil oil baron Tex Richman (Cooper). Time to get the gang back together!

There's a lot to like in this Disney-backed reboot: star cameos ranging from Jack Black to James Carville, some nicely staged musical numbers and several truly gut-busting gags. Yet the nostalgia-tinged story, co-written by Segel and



Nicholas Stoller, is overstuffed with dewy-eyed character arcs and shtick that seems more appropriate to Judd Apatow than the late Jim Henson. The Muppet legacy is in no way sullied, but the over-the-moon magic is missing. *Keith Uhlich*

Preview

Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chip-wrecked

(G) USA, 2011. Matthew Gray Gubler, Amy Poehler, Jesse McCartney

As the punning title suggests, the all-singing, all-dancing Chipmunks (Alvin, Theodore, Simon and the Chipettes) wind up on a desert island after a prank involving a kite aboard their holiday cruise ship goes awry. But they get more than they bargained for when they discover the island is also home to an obstreperous resident. With its slick combination of live action and CGI, a raft of contemporary tunes, some natty



dance moves and those cute (read annoying) squeaky voices, chances are *Shrek Forever After* director Mike Mitchell's effort will prove a big kiddie hit this Christmas. *TO*