

FEATURE

'Pluto Nash' features typical Murphy

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Eddie Murphy stars as the owner of a lucrative nightclub on the moon in the lame action comedy "The Adventures of Pluto Nash" (Warner Bros.).

The film, set in the year 2087, has been sitting on the shelf for the past two years since it wrapped up production. It was not screened in time for critics' press deadlines, usually a bad sign for moviegoers. In "Pluto's" case, it was a very bad sign.

As Nash, Murphy is on autopilot as he throws out lines in his typical, smart-alecky fashion, and is clearly just collecting a paycheck. Nash is an ex-convict with expertise in smuggling who has decided to go straight by running a nightclub. His is the moon's hot spot and things are going great until lunar gangster Mogan (Joe Pantoliano) shows up with an offer Nash shouldn't refuse, but does anyway. Mogan and his cross-eyed, albino sidekick have come on behalf of the mysterious Rex Crater, who wants to turn Nash's place into a gambling joint and is willing to eliminate Nash in order to get what he wants.

This is the poor premise on which the film is based. Chunks of story and character development seem to have been deleted. The film is basically one long chase scene. Murphy evades his chasers in mundane ways, never making the audience think that he won't get away. The slow-witted jokes are all drawn from the same sexual innuendo fountain while some cheap laughs are procured from the idea of cloning. The film also has a bit of a distasteful streak running through it, exemplified in a scene where Nash offers his congratulations and drinks on the house to a customer celebrating his divorce.

Murphy's standard performance is the



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Rosario Dawson, Randy Quaid and Eddie Murphy star in the movie, "The Adventures of Pluto Nash."

only thing that doesn't allow the film to sink into utter cinematic despair. Though we've seen this Murphy before many times over, he's still entertaining in his own way.

The actors in the large supporting cast are impressive but, with such meager material, none shines. Rosario Dawson plays the obligatory romantic interest and Randy Quaid is Nash's bodyguard, Bruno, a robot quickly approaching obsolescence. Pam Grier is Nash's mother. Peter Boyle is Rowland, a retired police detective who can get the goods on anyone. Luis Guzman stars as a Puerto Rican smuggler who holds Nash up to be his hero while Jay Mohr is a Scottish-singer-turned-Italian-crooner who sings in Rex Carter's fancy casino.

The muddled narrative culminates in a

face-off between Nash and Rex, whose surprise identity is finally revealed in the last reel. At this point, the audience might as well have gone to the moon themselves for all the entertainment value this film offers.

Due to sporadic sexual innuendo, intermittent violence, fleeting rear nudity and recurring crass language and sexual expressions, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Navarro is on the staff of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Serving Sara' serves up sparse comedy

By Anne Navarro
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — In "Serving Sara" (Paramount), a routine romantic comedy, a pretty wife convinces a process server to hand out divorce papers to her Texas tycoon husband instead of her, consequently ensuring her a bigger portion of the marital loot.

Low on laughs, director Reginald Hudlin's road trip film introduces Joe (Matthew Perry), a down-and-dirty process server who, through his ingenious methods, always manages to lay legal documents on everyone from mobsters to millionaires. Lately however, he hasn't been able to get the job done as efficiently, which irks his bottom-line boss, Ray (Cedric The Entertainer), and delights his competitive colleague Tony (Vincent Pastore), who's been undermining Joe's efforts all along.

Entrusted with one last big job to prove himself, Joe must serve lovely English trophy wife Sara Moore (Elizabeth Hurley) with divorce papers from her cattle ranch mogul hubby Gordon (Bruce Campbell) while she's in New York City. But she en-

tices Joe to turn the tables on Gordon with an offer of \$1 million if Joe will serve Gordon first, down in the Lone Star State. In this way, Sara sees some of the millions she helped her husband amass; if she had been served first, she would have gotten zip.

With dollar signs in his eyes, Joe agrees, and the two are off criss-crossing the country to get to Gordon with the papers. Along the way, Joe starts to fall for new boss Sara in the predictable fashion seen hundreds of times before in romantic comedies such as this one.

Most — if not all — of the funny (or somewhat funny) lines have been given away in the trailers or TV commercials for the film. Writers Jay Scherick and David Ronn aren't able to overcome either the script's crater-sized plot holes or the wobbly pace of the film which lurches and stops without ever finding its stride.

Hurley is pleasant and affable on screen, but her acting range is limited as is her cardboard character. And although it was done for laughs, her trampy outfit, including super-miniskirt and tight T-shirt emblazoned with the words "Trailer Trash"

across her chest, seems unnecessary.

Perry is appealing also, but he is basically playing his character Chandler from the hit TV sitcom "Friends" with very little deviation. Part of the explanation for this may be that production on the film was halted for two months after Perry checked himself into rehab for a second time. He just may have been on autopilot.

"Serving Sara" tries to incorporate elements from "Midnight Run" and "Fletch" but ends up being a mishmash, serving up little by way of entertaining comedy.

Due to sporadic comically intended violence, a gross-out scene involving the sexual stimulation of a bull and much crass language and crude sexual innuendos with some profanity, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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USCCB reviews home videos

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting. Theatrical movies on video have a USCCB classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating and indicate the appropriate age group for the video audience.

'In the Bedroom'

Powerful story about a middle-aged couple (Sissy Spacek and Tom Wilkinson) coping with the death of their college-bound son (Nick Stahl) who is savagely murdered by his older girlfriend's (Marisa Tomei) ex-husband (William Mapother). Coaxing exceptional performances from the ensemble cast, Todd Field's accomplished directorial debut is subtly intense and deliberately paced as it tackles the spouses' grief and resentment which ultimately lead to vigilante justice. Some violence, profanity and rough language. The USCCB classification is A-IV — adults, and the MPA rating is R (Miramax).

'Birthday Girl'

Adapted from a play about a lonely woman (Julia Roberts) who meets a Russian mail-order bride (Michelle Williams) over the Internet. The film is a surprise when the woman's cousin (Matthew McConaughey) shows up. Initial confusion gives way to a more serious tone. Some violence, profanity and some increasing sexual innuendo. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults, and the MPA rating is PG-13 (Miramax).

'Clockwork Orange'

Openly violent adventure in which a teen (Mylar) finds an oddball who shows everyone how to live. The film is a near masterpiece. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults, and the MPA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. (Paramount)

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