

Dull, dumb 3-D film disappoints

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — “Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over” (Dimension) is, as advertised, 3-D — those three D’s being, dull, dumb and disappointing.

Director Robert Rodriguez scored big in 2001 with the original “Spy Kids,” then stutter-stepped in 2002 with the less-than-impressive sequel, “Spy Kids 2: The Island of Lost Dreams,” and has fallen flat on its sprockets with the third installment.

The first cleverly married imaginative special effects to a smart, entertaining story which did not insult young viewers’ intelligence. The secret of its appeal was that it resisted the temptation to put the visual cart before the narrative horse. This time around the narrative horse is nowhere to be found — not even as glue to hold together the threadbare plot. The filmmaker jettisons story in favor of gimmicky, fun-house tricks, the sign of a sagging series.

Young Juni Cortez (Daryl Sabara) is running a private-eye operation. He is recruited back into service by

the OSS when his big sister, Carmen (Alexa Vega) is captured while on assignment to hack into and shut down a dangerous video game which controls the consciousness of any child who plays it, the dastardly handiwork of the evil mastermind, Toymaker (Sylvester Stallone).

Ricardo Montalban is Juni’s wheelchair-bound grandfather. There are brief cameos by the adult Cortez couple, Antonio Banderas and Carla Gugino, as well as by characters from the two previous films.

Sadly, the 3-D environment is populated by one-dimensional characters. Stallone is the sole exception, playing several different loony characters — splintered personalities of the schizophrenic Toymaker — with glee. If you are going to embarrass yourself, you might as well have a good time while doing it.

In an ironic twist, the film, which sets out to save kids from a sinisterly addictive video game, itself takes on the visual tone of a video game — and will without doubt be followed



Dimension Films/CNS

Ryan Pinkston stars in the movie “Spy Kids 3D: Game Over.”

by a preordained addictive video game marketed at youngsters.

One hopes “Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over” will live up to its title and truly signal the end of the line for this franchise — but that’s highly doubtful. Can you say “Spy Kids: Reboot?”

“Spy Kids 3-D” imparts a positive message about the importance of family, clearly condemning vengeance and extolling forgiveness. It also touches on human-dignity issues involving the grandfather’s handicap. However, these laudable sentiments are consistently undermined by the film’s saccharine sentimentality and preachy tone.

MovieReviews

Due to some menace and some mild action sequences, the USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

DiCerto is on the staff of the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Bad acting, script make ‘Gigli’ a waste of time

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — A two-bit hood falls for the curvaceous female mob enforcer contracted to assist him in a high-level kidnapping only to discover that she is gay in the leaden romantic comedy “Gigli” (Columbia).

As the eponymous thug played by Ben Affleck is quick to clarify, “Gigli rhymes with really” — as in really poorly written, really badly acted, really a waste of your time.

Academy members may reconsider the Oscar they awarded director Martin Brest in 1992 for “Scent of a Woman” after they get a whiff of this stinker. Brest, who should be brought up on double charges since he also received a writing credit, is quite possibly responsible for delivering the biggest bomb since the Enola Gay.

To make a dumb story short, Affleck plays Larry Gigli, a West Coast bush-league leg-breaker who really doesn’t have the stomach for his chosen line of work. Underneath his slickly coifed hair and goomba bravura is a sensitive guy searching for more than his Soprano-lite, dead-end existence. His boss, Louis (Lenny Venito), assigns Gigli to kid-

nap the mentally handicapped kid brother (Justin Bartha) of a federal prosecutor, in the hopes of strong-arming the feds into dropping an investigation against a mob associate back East. Aware of his stooge’s habit of screwing up jobs, Louis hires some insurance muscle in the person of Ricki (Jennifer Lopez), a gorgeous lesbian who practices tantric yoga and spouts Zen aphorisms.

That’s the set-up. Of course, given the hype generated by the off-screen romance of the stars, the real purpose of the afterthought plot is simply to allow ample time for the most written-about couple since Adam and Eve to sizzle on screen and show off their preternatural good looks.

In between cooing glances, Gigli finds himself falling in love with Ricki, only to be left licking his wounds when he learns that they both order their sexual entrees from the same menu column. The film’s harebrained ending reverses much of what preceded it, and should stoke the embers of the “nature” vs. “nurture” debate concerning homosexuality.

Despite all the ballyhoo, Affleck and Lopez are not the second com-

ing of Bogey and Bacall — or, for that matter, even Lisa-Marie Presley and Michael Jackson. In fact the Jen-Ben pairing generates about as many sparks as matches in a monsoon. The scant flames ignited on screen are thoroughly extinguished by the utter inanity of the bone-headed script.

The film’s tone is never established, seesawing awkwardly between comedy and melodrama. Affleck, a rabid, card-carrying member of the Red Sox nation, seems about as comfortable in his role as he would in Yankee pin-stripes. His faux-fugeddaboutit facade feels forced, amounting to little more than a really bad impersonation of Robert De Niro — or a halfway decent one of comedian Andrew Dice Clay. Lopez’s performance proves that a lot of ego can be squeezed into very tight outfits. The other cast members are one-note plot-placeholders; they include Bartha doing a lame parody of Dustin Hoffman in “Rain Man” and Al Pacino doing a dead-on parody of himself.

On a much more disturbing level, the narrative is fueled by a warped view of sexuality inconsistent with Catholic teachings on the subject.

Beneath the banality of the offensive sexual banter which pervades much of the dialogue is a more insidious denial of objective moral norms concerning sexual intimacy. Brest seems to suggest that sexuality is merely a malleable social construct — illustrated by Ricki’s waffling proclivities. The film’s moral relativism is summed up by Gigli’s mother (Lainie Kazan), who, shrugging off Ricki’s homosexuality, states, “Life is not always black and white” — in other words, there is no objective morality, only subjective shades of gray.

In “Gigli,” Lopez has hit new J-lows. If her next pairing with Affleck in the soon to be released “Jersey Girl” is anything like this clunker, she may be known as Jenny from the schlock.

Due to a sexual encounter, excessive sexually explicit and rough language, as well as profanity and brief strong violence, the USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

DiCerto is on the staff of the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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Mike Latona/C

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