

Remake is deliciously different

BY ALAN HAYES
STAFF WRITER

The 1974 film adaptation of Roald Dahl's novel, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," scared the bejesus out of me.

I'm not just talking about the psychedelic boat ride — that scared everybody. The whole thing frightened me — the Oompa Loompas, Veruca Salt and Wonka himself.

In Gene Wilder's 1974 portrayal of Willy Wonka, I saw not a kindly, eccentric candy man, but a tootsie-roll tyrant who ruled over his Candy Reich with an iron fist and wasn't afraid to shrink, blueberryize or throw in the garbage the only visitors his factory had seen in years.

Thus, it was not with fond memories of the original film that I approached Tim Burton's new

MOVIE REVIEW

"CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY"

★★★★

adaptation of Dahl's book.

I was pleasantly surprised, however, to find that Burton's remake surpasses the original film and will likely exceed many viewers' expectations. The universe Burton created in "Charlie" is one that operates by many rules of reality but is infused with enough magic to allow an audience to get lost in its strangeness.

At the center of this strange world is Johnny Depp, who turns in a delightfully eccentric performance as Wonka. Much has been made of Depp's realization of Dahl's creepy confectioner; many critics

have speculated on its basis in real life — the creepiness of Michael Jackson.

Consider this: The man Depp is portraying is one who has spent the last few decades of his life surrounded by nothing but "little people," runs a psychotropic candy factory and has had no contact with the outside world for years.

One can only imagine the effect this would have on a person's psyche.

The world Wonka inhabits is one that could drive even the sanest of individuals a little batty. This should come as no surprise as every Tim Burton film, from "Beetle Juice" to "Big Fish," has wrapped the viewer in a vibrant world that exists somewhere just to the left of reality.

Not only is the inside of Wonka's

factory an eye-popping experiment in psychedelia (early in the film, Wonka encourages his guests to "try some of my grass"), but even the London shanty that Charlie's family inhabits just outside the factory gates is subject to the particular physics of Burton's world.

The storytelling isn't always on par with the visuals, but this is not as big a fault as it might be in other, more boring films.

Moviegoers might eventually tire of seeing films that emphasize visuals over storytelling, or they might start to pass on Wonka's grass, but until then the new adaptation should be a popular interpretation of Dahl's classic novel.



Charlie (Freddie Highmore) enjoys some plants made of vibrant confections during his lucky trip into Willy Wonka's mystical chocolate factory. COURTESY OF WARNER BROTHERS

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Edgy author's latest is sinister but predictable

BY JOHN COGGIN
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Chuck Palahniuk has built a career on exposing the insanity of our culture through disgustingly ironic cautionary tales on American commercialism. His new book does more of the same.

"Haunted" is a series of short stories, sloppily glued together by a cumbersome narrative about a bunch of wannabe writers who are kidnapped by a crazy old man named Wittier.

Responding to an ad offering total seclusion from the outside world for three months, asking only that you, "Gamble a small fraction of your life," for a chance to create a literary masterpiece, 23 unwitting people are tricked by Wittier (Ha! Wittier, indeed) into an experiment in desperation.

He traps them in an old, ornate movie theater and bars them from leaving until they fulfill their promise to write.

Ostensibly a modern take on "The Canterbury Tales" or "The Decameron," "Haunted" actually is a meditation on the current state of popular culture. In Palahniuk's world, 15 minutes of fame have been trimmed down to five-minute segments (if you're lucky) on morning talk shows and an ugly battle for stardom between reality show contestants.

The book's characters become determined to turn their kidnapping into a salable story, each set on manipulating the drama — Cut off a finger? Sabotage the food supply? — so as to ensure their status as the star of the show.

The book's timely plot is the perfect reflection of a summer in which "TomKat" — the nickname that's been given to the new relationship between Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes — is a story precisely because everyone thinks it's

fiction, and Janice Dickinson is fighting (and beating) reality-diva Omarosa for screen time on "The Surreal Life 3" by publicly mocking mentally handicapped children.

However, Palahniuk exhausts the high concept halfway through the novel.

By designating each story as a confession of past sins by some character in the greater narrative, the author encourages the reader to expect each one to take on a distinct personality and to reveal more about the character telling it than why we know them only as the "Duke of Vandals" or the "Lady Baglady."

Instead, in each chapter, we get Palahniuk doing a lot of really good impressions of "Chuck Palahniuk." Standing alone, each story is cleverly sinister in its observations. But by infusing the reading experience with an expectation that each one should add to and develop what we already know, the author waters down the effect of every tale.

Contact the A & E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Receptions have never been this fun

BY JOHN COGGIN
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn recently crashed the summer box office with a comedy about two guys who like to crash weddings to pick up girls. While performing the crash of all crashes at the wedding of the daughter of the secretary of the treasury (sorry for all the "of's"), Wilson falls for the bride's sister (Rachel McAdams). Let the raunchy sex scenes ensue!

If this is your mentality going into "Wedding Crashers," then expect to be disappointed.

We are the generation that grew into adulthood on a healthy diet of "American Pies," and for an audience that has seen a suburban father walk in on his teenage son humping a hot apple pie, watching a woman "rub one out" for Vince Vaughn at a packed dinner table might seem a little old hat. While hilariously filmed, that scene — in which Isla Fisher giddily massages Vaughn's Dockers-clad crotch — hardly qualifies as "raunchy" (at least not in the blue states).

So, ladies, don't believe the ads. The movie actually is rather sweet. Endearing, even.

MOVIE REVIEW

"WEDDING CRASHERS"

★★★★

Wilson offers up an outstanding audition for "leading man" status in future Hollywood romcoms, and Vaughn finally finds the role through which he can channel all of his rambling musing on life, love and relationships — to hilarious effect.

After successful turns in "Mean Girls" and "The Notebook," McAdams further hints at an impressive range and is the only one to pull off actual acting in "Crashers."

But, then, this is exactly the way you want it. Vaughn gets to play "Vince Vaughn" (a less insecure and slightly less horny version of his character in "Swingers"), and Wilson gets to play "Owen Wilson" (a slightly less blond version of his character in "Zoolander").

However, if you haven't seen the making-of specials that have been flooding cable TV for the past two weeks, each giving away all her funniest moments, then you'll find that it is Fisher who steals the show as Claire's sister, Gloria. Her guileless, certifiably insane daddy's girl provides the perfect balance

to Vaughn's verging-on-psychotic womanizer.

In supporting roles, Christopher Walken and Jane Seymour play Claire's politico parents. Excepting the scene in which Seymour forces Wilson's character to call her "Kittykat," both actors are underused. They probably had more lines in the original script, but the editors seem to have cropped down their roles in favor of showcasing more of Vaughn and Wilson's well-honed improv skills.

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