



Camp North Star's "in" group poses for the annual summer camp portrait in Paramount's Meatballs

MEATBALLS

Enough to upset tummy

TORONTO — Take a dash of M*A*S*H, a bit of The Bad News Bears, a lot of Animal House and mix thoroughly with bad taste and weren't-they-the-good-old-days nostalgia and you have Paramount's entry in the summer scramble for movie audiences, Meatballs. It premiered in Toronto last week and opens July 13 in London.

Director Ivan Reitman and writers Len Blum, Dan Goldberg, Janis Allen and Harold Ramis have cooked up a recipe which rips off successful cinematic comedy devices from other movie hits but adds none of its own imagination, style or substance.

In short, these Meatballs are pretty bland. Reitman and crew should have their beds short-sheeted or their fingers dipped in warm water while they sleep for this piece of junk-food cinema. Despite Paramount's promotion and the film's PG rating, Meatballs probably will neither financially nor artistically outgross Reitman's previous smash, Animal House.

Bill Murray of Saturday Night Live fame gives Meatballs its box-office appeal and he works hard to bring the comedy off. But most of his efforts are in vain and his talents are not used to any advantage. He is wasted in this film.

Murray plays Tripper, a mad-cap counsellor at Camp Northstar with a heart-of-gold who leads his CITs (counsellors-in training) into one escapade after another. For example, they kidnap camp director Morty (Harvey Atkin) and hang him and his bed in a tree at the camp's entrance just as people begin arriving for Parents' Day.

But his craziness hides a sensitive personality which comes through when he befriends a young, homesick camper named Rudy, played by Toronto youngster Chris Makepeace.

Tripper tries to give Rudy a sense of worth and a feeling of belonging. During early-morning jogging sessions with the boy, he tells him: "You make one good friend a summer and you're doing well."

Awkward and unpopular Rudy comes through in the Olympics held with the rich, snobby kids from Camp Mohawk, and becomes Northstar's hero.

Tripper's warm-heartedness is also featured in his romantic liaison with Roxanne, played by Kate Lynch.

During the course of the film all the camp stereotypes are represented — campfires; party-raids; skinny, spastic kids; clumsy, fat kids; kids who wear glasses; pranks like running pants up the flag-pole — and all without imagination.

Kids talking dirty lost their charm with The Bad News Bears and the camp public address system used for comical announcements was much better in M*A*S*H.

In fact, there are only two laughs in this film, both courtesy of Bill Murray. He announces the winner of the "guess supper" contest: a camper

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who came the closest to the right answer — veal — with his guess "some kind of meat."

The other yuks happen while Murray tells a horror story at a campfire about a killer who speared victims with his artificial hand, a hook. As he tells the campers the killer has never been found and that he could still be lurking in the woods he pulls down his sleeve to reveal a hook, scaring the day-lights out of the campers. Then they quip: "Are you sure it was his hand? Last time I heard it, it was his foot."

Murray gets some amusing mileage out of a repartee with Kate Lynch when he dances with her and asks: "Is that a bra you're wearing or are you expecting an assassination attempt?" She replies: "Is that a pack of Clorets in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?"

Filmed on location at Camp White Pine in Haliburton, Meatballs is the Canadian film industry's latest hope for international recognition. It will probably make all kinds of money at the box-office and prove that Canadians can get "dirty" with the best of them. But that won't make Meatballs any more interesting than a rainy day at camp.



Time out for a short rest



Jack Blum gets the shaving foam treatment from Keith Knight



Bill Murray serenades his summer romance, Kate Lynch



Leading cheers at Olympiad



Bill Murray and camper Chris Makepeace



A kiss for the team captain



Meatballs director Ivan Reitman, left, and producer Dan Goldberg