

Cirque ails with eye on future

Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant (12A)
3/5

Family/Comedy/Drama/Action/Horror. Chris Massoglia, Josh Hutcherson, John C. Reilly, Jessica Carlson, Patrick Fugit, Ken Watanabe, Salma Hayek, Michael Cerveris, Ray Stevenson, Willem Dafoe, Don McManus, Colleen Camp. Director: Paul Weitz.

Damon Smith

PAUL Weitz (About A Boy) directs and co-writes this spooky fantasy

based on the popular series of books by Limerick writer Darren Shan.

With the second film in the Twilight saga, The New Moon, poised to wax and wane in cinemas from November 20, The Vampire's Assistant is perfectly timed to sink its fangs into the same teenage market.

Shan has penned 12 books, divided into four trilogies, so the scope for a long-running franchise to rival Stephenie Meyer's romances is evident.

However, this family-friendly yarn is a largely bloodless affair, solely designed to set the scene for future films.

By spending so much time looking forward, screenwriters Weitz and Brian Helgeland neglect to sketch characters in sufficient detail.

While many of the supporting cast gnaw unabashedly on scenery, leading man Massoglia is insipid as our guide to a magical world where anything should be possible.

High-achieving teenager Darren (Massoglia) has devoted most of his time to his schoolwork, scoring straight As to the delight of his parents (McManus, Camp).



Chris Massoglia as Darren and John C. Reilly as Crepsley struggle to find a rhythm in their brief exchanges
Left: Reilly gets up out of bed to answer a knock on the door

Little does Darren know that Mr Tiny (Cerveris) and his underling Murlaugh (Stevenson) have recruited Steve to the deadly vampaneze group, and they intend to manipulate the youngster to shatter the 200-year-old truce between the rival vampire factions.

Cirque Du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant begins in style with an eerie animated credits sequence.

The screenwriters appropriate plot threads from Shan's opening trilogy without due care, hurriedly shoe-horning protagonists into a narrative that unfolds in fits and spurts.

Massoglia's (fittingly) lifeless performance leaves Weitz's film without an emotional heart, and we remain outsiders to the world of the bearded lady Madame Truska (Hayek) and computer-generated Gollum-like creatures who welcome strangers by biting their hand.

Reilly is poorly served by the script, and he struggles to find a rhythm in brief exchanges with his co-star.

The romance between Darren and Rebecca is almost an afterthought, and certainly doesn't kindle the same passion as Edward and Bella in Twilight - they would eat The Vampire's Assistant for breakfast.

Visually, the months of painstaking effort have been worthwhile, including fast-paced action sequences of the wily vulpine sneaking around farmyards in search of a tasty treat.

Mr Fox (voiced by Clooney) is never content with his life, always looking to move up in the world with his long-suffering wife, Mrs Fox (Streeep). He plots a daring raid on the chicken coop only to

Stop motion flick is cute as a fox, but who is it for?

Fantastic Mr Fox (PG)
4/5

Family/Comedy/Drama. Featuring the voices of George Clooney, Meryl Streep, Jason Schwartzman, Eric Anderson, Bill Murray, Hugo Guinness, Michael Gambon, Brian Cox. Director: Wes Anderson.

Damon Smith

HIP indie director Wes Anderson (The Royal Tenenbaums, The Darjeeling Limited) is an odd fit for Roald Dahl's classic children's story.

The film-maker certainly brings his offbeat and distinctly adult sensibilities to bear on Fantastic Mr Fox, creating another portrait of familial dysfunction and miscommunication.

Anderson imprints his personality so indelibly on the script, co-written by Noah Baumbach, that it's hard to see children enjoying the film.

The simplicity and sweetness of the original story, which ran to less than 100 pages with illustrations from Quentin Blake, becomes obscured by rewrites and additions.

Unlike his previous films, Anderson chooses stop-motion animation as his medium here and it works a treat.

Mr Fox cannot completely shy away from his animal instincts, and he turns to stealing from farmers Bunce (Guinness), Bean (Gambon) and Boggis (Cox), roping in Kristofferson to his hare-brained schemes.

Having been humiliated by the fox, the trio lay siege to the trees where the family resides and open fire on Mr Fox, shooting off his bushy tail.

Luckily, neighbouring critters including Badger (Murray) rally around Mr Fox to help him elude the pursuers.



The Fantastic Mr Fox and his peeps up to something crafty, no doubt, to get the better of the farmers

get caught in a trap.

"If we're still alive tomorrow, I want you to find another line of work," seethes Mrs Fox.

Two years later, Mr Fox has followed his wife's dictate and is the breadwinner for his family, including a disgruntled son Ash (Schwartzman) who just wants to win the respect of his old man.

Tension between the generations flares when nephew Kristofferson (Anderson) comes to stay and puts poor Ash in the shade.

The climactic escape is mind-boggling, leading to another cute gag reminiscent of Wallace and Gromit when Mr Fox races towards Bean's motorcycle and sidecar and drives away in an exact miniature replica hidden behind the hulking machine.

The vocal performances from Clooney and Streep lend warmth to their warring couple, with fine support from Schwartzman, Murray and co, who are all regular collaborators on Anderson's films.

For its technical ingenuity, Fantastic Mr Fox is a film you admire and marvel at rather than unserved love.

For all the latest
omniplex film information,
special offers

Book Online
NOW at www.omniplex.ie

Gift Vouchers Now Available

OMNIPLEX