

Austin's lost powers

Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me, directed by Jay Roach, written by Mike Myers and Michael McCullers

David Walsh
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I would not make any extraordinary claims for *The Spy Who Shagged Me*, but there is something endearing about the film, the second about British secret agent Austin Powers. In the first, Powers, the creation of Canadian comic and performer Mike Myers, popped up in the 1990s, after having been cryogenically stored away for 30 years. In this, he returns to the 1960s in search of his stolen “mojo,” the secret to his libido. Living in the present decade has dampened his desire.

Powers—Peter Sellers, instead of Sean Connery, as James Bond—is eternally in pursuit of the “groovy” and the “sexy.” His arch-enemy, Dr. Evil (also Myers), is out to dominate the world. Powers teams up with Felicity Shagwell (Heather Graham) to thwart Evil's incompetent efforts. Somehow things turn out all right. Powers saves Washington from being laser-bombed and, more importantly, wins the girl.

The film, a kind of anti- *Star Wars*, is silly and sometimes sophomoric, but it has a certain sweetness to it. Myers, whose parents came from Liverpool, says: “I loved that era [England in the 1960s] when everything was made sexy, everything was eroticized. You couldn't have a kettle, you had to have a ... sexy kettle. You couldn't just be a flight attendant, you had to be a sexy stew. Then one day, I think it was 1978, it all just stopped, but not for Austin Powers.”

Whatever one makes of Myers' version of cultural history, his point is fairly clear: we live in dreary times. Like Lemmy Caution in *Alphaville*, although more cheerful, Austin Powers is a man out of place. His delight in things, however, is infectious. And when he meets Felicity back in the 60s, well, it's a match made in heaven. Cinema heaven too, as Heather Graham is infinitely more interesting than the chilly, self-involved

Elizabeth Hurley, the co-star of the first film, whose character in the sequel appropriately enough turns out to be a killer-robot. Robert Wagner (Number Two), Rob Lowe (Young Number Two), Kristen Johnston (Ivana Humpalot), Gia Carides (Robin Swallows), Michael York (Basil Exposition) and Tim Robbins (President of the United States) are also on hand. Elvis Costello and Burt Bacharach make guest appearances, as does Jerry Springer (presiding over an episode of his show, “My Father is Evil and Wants To Take Over the World”).

Many of the sight-gags fail to come off and the toilet humor is wearing, but I was taken with the cheerful quasi-anarchism of the film, its relentless demand for pleasure and fun. The whole thing is carried off without cynicism, sneering or condescension—rare these days. The cheerfulness extends to the look of the film, in particular to its vulgar and loving recreation of an imaginary Swinging London. In general, I found as much humor in the decor of the film as in its jokes.



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