

*Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles* (2001) Directed by Simon Wincer. Written by Matthew Berry and Eric Abrams

At one point in Paul Hogan's *Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles*, Mick (Hogan) gets a job as a Hollywood extra for the filming of, "Lethal Agent III". If the first "Lethal Agent" bombed in the theatres and the sequel went straight to video, "Lethal Agent III" was described as the worst of the lot. Is this a prediction for *Crocodile Dundee III*? It certainly lacked the romantic charm of the 1986 original and now, the franchise can only parody itself. The motif of this series is the juxtaposition of the rural and urban jungles; at its heart is the character of Dundee himself. He may have fallen off the turnip truck, Mick explains, but he didn't land on his head. Or if he did, he didn't land very hard.

The opening visual brings us back to the original movie, the sparsely-treed bush of Australia's Northern Territory, home to a variety of strange and wondrous creatures, none stranger, of course, than Crocodile Dundee himself. Like the first movie, we meet Dundee by reputation before we meet him in person. Mick is the "second best crocodile hunter" in the territory, according to a Dundee wanna-be and full-time tour guide in charge of a bus load of city folk who have arrived in Walkabout Creek, population 20, for a tour of the fringes of the outback.

Mick knows that he has been reduced from hunting crocodiles to providing a side-show for the tourist market. He gives them their money's worth. Part of the charm of the Dundee character is his fallibility. A giant croc gets the better of him and, with his boat at the bottom of the river, Mick and his mate find themselves dangling precariously from a tree limb, in the sight of both the hungry croc and the mocking city tourists.

The tourists are the most visible indication that things have changed, even in Walkabout Creek. Mick's aboriginal mate, Jacko has an early cameo appearance sporting traditional paint and dressed in nothing but a loin cloth. Consistent with much of the humour of the series, however, the bushmen are more in tune with civilization than Mick is. The loin cloth conceals a cell phone and he's costumed to perform for the tourists.

*Crocodile Dundee III* remains in the outback only long enough to set up a couple of plot devices -- Mick's ability to suddenly vanish in the bush and his hypnotic powers over wild animals -- and to introduce two new characters. It then moves quickly to Los Angeles.

Linda Kozlowski reprises her role as Sue, Mick's common-law wife who has lived in Walkabout Creek long enough to produce a nine-year old son, Mikey. What she has been otherwise doing all these years in the Australian bush is never explained. In fact, Kozlowski play a relatively small role in this movie. The romantic conclusion of the first movie has led them nowhere but into domestic routine. There are certainly no visible sparks left in their relationship.

In place of Sue as Mick's straight-(wo)man, there is son, Mikey (and, later in the movie, Dundee's crocodile-hunter mate. In the original movie, the first half took place in Australia, with Mick revealing the mysteries of the bush for Sue. *Crocodile Dundee*

*III* moves more quickly to civilization – or at least California – when, at the behest of her newspaper-baron father, Sue accepts a temporary job as the editor of his paper in Los Angeles (a name, Mick explains, that means “lost angels” in Italian). The humour here is that Mick becomes an urban tour-guide for his son and mate, offering off-the-cuff mis-explanations for the mysteries of California.

Parallel to the opening bird’s-eye perspective of the wild bush, the Los Angeles sequence opens with the camera zooming above the skyscrapers and freeways while at ground level there is no shortage of strange wildlife of the human variety. This “jungle to jungle” theme may be becoming a cliché, but for people like me who live in the middle of sticks and woods, it is still effective.

Much of the humour depends on recollection of the earlier movies. There is, for example, the same homophobia. As they navigate through the urban jungle, Mick and his mate end up in a gay “cowboy” bar. His mate says that the only “woman” in the bar was the one at the door who invited them in. It takes only a brief hesitation on Mick’s part for us to recall his New York encounter with a man in drag. In an earlier twist on this theme, while sight-seeing on Baywatch beach, Mick meets a new-age woman searching for a sensitive husband and father. She thinks she’s found him (even if he’s as old as Robert Redford) until she concludes that Mick must be gay.

Some of the humour is satire. Mick is “from away” and, when we enter into his vision of Los Angeles, we see the “normal” as “absurd”. Weight loss, for example, is controlled by coffee enemas. Hollywood comes in for its share of satirical comment. The money-losing “Lethal Agent” franchise is a front for a smuggling scheme that Mick thwarts.

One of the problems with this movie is that it becomes an aggregation of one-gag scenes. Mick and Mikey encounter Mike Tyson in a cameo, playing a guru who teaches them to meditate – breathe out the bad, breathe in the new. Peaceful meditation is not exactly Tyson’s forte. Mick joins the Paramount Studio tour only because it allows him an opportunity to take out the robotic “anaconda” with his “small” jack knife – a scene which is, again, a twist on the original gag: “That’s not a knife”. The movie is more often a re-run than an original. This time, for example, Mick foils a pickpocket rather than a purse-snatcher.

In one bizarre sequence, however, the joke is set up but never delivered. Mick and Mikey rescue a skunk on the L. A. freeway, backing up traffic and bringing in the L. A. P. D. when a rumour that he has a bomb is passed down the line of drivers –this is how urban legends are born. As Mick approaches the cops armed only with a skunk, he tells Mikey not to worry because the police are their friends. This sounds like a set-up for a gag and I thought the trailer for the film showed Dundee face-down on the pavement being handcuffed, which would have provided a (predictable) punch-line. Any (equally predictable) opportunity provided by the skunk was also wasted. Instead, immediately after the “friends” line, the scene cuts away to Mick’s efforts that evening to keep his mate from hearing about his embarrassing faux pas. He’s too late, as we would expect. In LA, everything is news.

Mick is infallible when the movie plot requires it, though, snatching hand guns from would-be drive-by muggers in downtown L.A., and disarming, in a slapstick

sequence set in a variety of movie studios, several Eastern European gunmen in scenes that had my seven year-old howling with laughter. In one studio, Mick turns on the high-speed wind machine being used to film "Tornado Hunter II" and the bad guy is hit with everything including a flying Jersey cow. My son hasn't enjoyed himself this much at a movie since *Home Alone*.

In the end, I liked the movie more watching it than writing about it. Paul Hogan carries this movie, and an audience that cares for his character is taken along for the child's ride.