Written by Mike Schulz
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MEAN GIRLS

Recently, some friends introduced me to the considerable pleasures of *Freaks & Geeks* on DVD, and I understood why the show barely lasted a season; it was a nearly pitch-perfect rendering of high school's everyday horrors and comic humiliations, and what mass audience, hoping for mindless entertainment, wants to subject themselves to *that*? And just like that sublime TV series, *Mean Girls*, the new teen comedy directed by Mark Waters and written by Tina Fey, is so wickedly sharp and achingly funny that its target audience probably won't know what to make of it.(At the screening I attended, everyone laughed like hell at the overt physical comedy, but the movie's most hilarious dialogue fell on deaf ears.)

A sort of *Heathers*-lite, *Mean Girls* focuses on home-schooled Cady (the sensational Lindsay Lohan), whose attempts to secure popularity in her new public school become increasingly complex as she's torn between her true friends and the hateful girls (led by a comically voracious Rachel McAdams) who run things. All manner of adolescent one-upmanship ensues, and Fey's script crackles with vivid dissections of a teenager's cliques, projections, and fears of individuality. Within the parameters of its teen-movie format, Fey's script is positively ingenious; its leading characters are wonderfully fleshed-out, its marginal characters are good for numerous laughs, it employs a great screenwriting conceit – the unreliable narrator – and Fey has a rare gift for making characters' dialogue reveal as much about themselves as it does about others. (My favorite example among dozens of contenders: McAdams dismissing an old boyfriend with "All he cares about is *school* and his *mom* and his *friends*.") *Mean Girls* meanders a bit and might, like many an unpopular kid, be too smart for mass acceptance, but it might just be the best teen comedy the movies have given us in 15 years. No joke.

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