

## The Kids Are Alright: "Superbad" and "The Invasion"

Written by Mike Schulz

Wednesday, 22 August 2007 02:36

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### **SUPERBAD**

*Superbad*, the wildly hilarious, subtly moving, and only-a-little-disappointing comedy about two youths hell-bent on securing booze for (and getting laid at) a high school party, is directed by Greg Mottola, but it's impossible to miss the imprint of its producer, Judd Apatow.

Like Apatow's *Knocked Up* and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Superbad* is a comedic exploration of the male psyche at a very particular age, both thrillingly filthy and almost shockingly sweet - a humanist *Porky's* with a generous, only slightly romanticized world view. If, as I suggested a few months ago, Judd Apatow is our current movie-comedy savior, it's not merely because the TV *auteur* of *Freaks & Geeks* and *Undeclared* is making motion pictures, but because talents such as Mottola and *Superbad* screenwriters Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg are following his lead, creating dirty-funny works so specific, yet so universal, that you nod in recognition, wince with embarrassment, and roar with laughter in equal measure.

All throughout the film, you can't *believe* the scenes that *Superbad* is getting exactly right: the pornographic shorthand between best friends Seth (fearless slob comic Jonah Hill) and Evan (*Arrested Development*'s teen genius Michael Cera); the painful flirtation between Seth and Jules (Emma Stone, with a directness reminiscent of Jodie Foster's), and Evan and Becca (a luminous Martha Maclsaac); the heartfelt panic as Evan prepares to leave for college without Seth (and *with* inventive spaz Christopher Mintz-Plasse). *Superbad*, chock-full of hysterical encounters and what I hesitantly call "grace" notes - the montage of hand-drawn penises might already be the stuff of legend - is funny because it feels so *true*

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; the film is a clear-eyed look at youthful ridiculousness. (

*Superbad*

's leads

couldn't possibly be better-cast; Hill's apoplectic mania is stunningly well matched by Cera's deft underplaying.)

The film's opening 40 minutes, filled with fantastically rude throwaway banter and brilliant observational comedy, are close to perfect; its final 15 minutes are sublime. And the midsection? It's okay. Unfortunately, the majority of it is devoted to the consistently unamusing antics of Rogen and Bill Hader as a pair of rogue cops; the joke - these guys are more juvenile than the teenagers! - wears out its welcome in about two minutes, and continues for another 45.

Yet even the clunky scenes can't disrupt the joy you get from its superior ones. If 2007's cinematic summer will be remembered for something besides its onslaught of power sequels, it'll be for the ascendancy of Judd Apatow and friends to the top echelon of movie-comedy; at long last, the meek - or, at least, the *geek* - have truly inherited the earth.



### ***THE INVASION***

How the hell do you screw up Jack Finney's sci-fi touchstone *The Body Snatchers*, which has already inspired two classic movies (Don Siegel's 1956

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

and Philip Kaufman's 1978 remake), a creepy, underrated one (Abel Ferrara's

*Body Snatchers*

in 1994), and some of the genre's most comically trenchant satire?

If you're director Oliver Hirschbiegel, and your film is *The Invasion*, you follow an easy 10-step plan:

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1) You cast Nicole Kidman as the movie's emotional center, despite the actress' vacant stares and lifeless readings suggesting the most emotionally neutered person on the planet.

2) You allow Kidman to try out a laughably inconsistent accent (is it Southern? Western? Southwestern?), and then encourage half the cast - Jeremy Northam, Celia Weston, Josef Sommer, Roger Rees - to do the same.

3) You give the great Daniel Craig and Jeffrey Wright major supporting roles, and ensure that they appear zombified from the very beginning.

4) You show characters' transformations into pod people through computer-generated replications of their morphing internals, and make the effects so distractingly phony that you would've rolled your eyes had you seen them in *TRON*.

5) You flood the film with bizarre flash-forwards and jump cuts that make it seem as though the action is occurring in two time periods simultaneously, when it's barely occurring in *one*.

6) You put Veronica Cartwright - the sole human survivor of Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* - in a substantial cameo, which is really smart, and then refuse to give her character a proper send-off, which is really stupid.

7) You show the consequences of an earth under alien control - the end of war in Iraq, the end of terrorist bombings, the end of genocide - and then insist that this is a *bad* thing.

8) You remove all possible threat by making the alien virus' infiltration of the human body *reversible*, and the antidote found in the bloodstream of Kidman's adorable young son with the puppy-dog eyes.

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9) You tack on a preposterous action-flick climax that finds Kidman and her moppet, en route to an awaiting helicopter, hurtling through traffic with their car *on fire*.

10) You leave audiences asking themselves: Is it better to be a mindless, glassy-eyed drone, free of independent thought and will, or to be Nicole Kidman? As if there were a difference.