Written by Mike Schulz
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SPEED RACER

In future years, when I'm wondering exactly when it was that I turned into a very old man, I'm hoping I'll remember the date of May 9, 2008, when I fell asleep some 45 minutes into the onslaught of candy-colored incoherence called *Speed Racer*. And when, after returning to consciousness a minute or so later, I made it through another couple of scenes before falling asleep *again*.

My narcolepsy was all the more surprising considering that, during the film's first 10 minutes or so, I was actually having some fun. An updating of the beloved-by-many '60s cartoon, *Speed Racer,* written and directed by Larry and Andy Wachowski, opens like *The Matrix* in Munchkinland, with our youthful hero (Emile Hirsch, even less dimensional than his animated precursor) blazing along on a vibrantly detailed CGI track. He's simultaneously racing against his competitors and the spirit of his deceased brother, and with a minimum of verbal exposition, the movie's first reel gives us a rather exhilarating burst of too-muchness: Two concurrent narratives, flashbacks, an introduction to Speed's girlfriend (Christina Ricci) and family (John Goodman, Susan Sarandon, a scarily assured little goober named Paulie Litt, and a pet chimpanzee), and more eye-popping hues than you could shake some Pixy Stix at.

And soon afterwards, as often happens following a sugar rush, I crashed.

Will little kids like the movie? Maybe. Kids like all sorts of crap. And with its *Pushing Daisies*-on-a-triple-espresso visual design, *Speed Racer* is clearly some sort of extraordinary technical achievement; you're witness to every penny spent from the film's reported $120-million budget. But apparently $120 million isn't enough to buy a decent storyline, or a formidable villain (Roger Allam plays a typically bureaucratic heavy), or a romance that doesn't make you want to throw popcorn at the screen. (Or an editor with a shred of sense; at 135 minutes, *Speed Racer*

is oppressively long.) The movie is a conglomeration of irritatingly hyperactive sequences - the climax, which suggests
The Natural
's finale
if Roy Hobbs were played by Jesus, gives "overkill" brand-new meaning - and half-hearted "family values" interruptions that its actors seem embarrassed by, and I felt no shame for nodding off,
either
time, at the inanity of it all. I'm more concerned about
viewers who manage to slay
alert
.

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS ...

The romantic comedy *What Happens in Vegas ...* isn't as boring as *Speed Racer* - lazy and formulaic though it is, there's at least a
story
you can follow - but in all other regards this Cameron Diaz-Ashton Kutcher vehicle is a far worse movie; its offensive stupidity kept me awake. Director Tom Vaughan's witless, charmless effort finds uptight Diaz and slacker Kutcher meeting, drinking, and marrying, and subsequently forced into a six-month cohabitation in order to keep the $3 million they won on a slot machine. Yes, it pretty much
is
a Muppet movie (Dennis Miller shows up as a character named Judge Whopper), but instead of detailing the hideously unfunny, torturously uninspired "hilarity" that inevitably ensues, to say nothing of the leads' complete lack of chemistry and the god-awful filmmaking - Diaz should file a lawsuit for being lit so badly - let me instead focus on
What Happens
' positives: Treat Williams shows up, as does Lake Bell. Thank you for your time.

REDBELT

I don't know. I love David Mamet's writing style. *Love* it. The repeated phrases. The terse banter. The nutty metaphors. The snaky reversals. The interrupted thoughts. The ... what do you call it ... the cryptic epigrams that mean more than you think the less you think about them and ... you know ... less than you think the
more
you think about them. I love his parenthetical asides. (I love his
italics
.) I love that the movies he writes and directs seem to ... or
seem
to seem to ... sneak into theatres without your knowing it. Like
Spartan
. Or
Heist
.
Or the new jujitsu drama
Redbelt
. And I love when really good actors tear into Mamet's dialogue. Like Chiwetel Ejiofor. He's the lead in
Redbelt
and he's great in it.
Great.
(So great that you can't hear his British accent.)
So are Joe Mantegna and David Paymer and Ricky Jay. All of them. They've done a lot of Mamet, so ... you know ... they
know
.

But you know what I *don't* love? Do you? When scenes go on and on and seem to be about nothing *but* Mamet's style. And when the plot gets so twisty and contrived and ... what's the word ... *convoluted* that you can't remember who's doing what to whom. Or why you should
care
. And when the portentousness turns into parody, like when thousands of cheering jujitsu fans here ... swear to God, I'm not making this up ... are suddenly silenced when Ejiofor enters the ring. (You know what else I don't love? Rebecca Pidgeon showing up. I know she's married to

Mamet and all. But
still
.) I didn't hate
Redbelt
. It's very Mamet, so there's a lot in it I enjoyed. But I'd probably enjoy Mamet's recent movies more if they weren't... you know... so ... you know ...
Mamet
.