GET SMART

I can only imagine the business conversation that led to remaking TV's *Get Smart* as a big-budget summertime blockbuster. But I'm guessing it went something like this: "Let's remake TV's *Get Smart* as a big-budget summertime blockbuster!" "Okay! Let's!"

After all, you've got comedy, you've got action, you've got romance, you've got name recognition (for the grown-ups, at least) ... . Toss in a few recognizable faces, pump up the visual-effects budget, advertise the hell out of the thing, and presto! Instant hit! That the movie itself is woefully predictable, achingly synthetic, and desperately unfunny probably doesn't matter in the least - *Get Smart* is a success in terms of the only thing it was designed to do: make money.

There's something troubling, and maybe a little insidious, about the awfulness of the *Get Smart* film, because while watching it, it seems you can never quite pinpoint what it is you hate about it. (I succeeded when the jet pilot puked into his air-sickness bag, and then spilled the contents in front of us.) The actors certainly aren't bad: Steve Carell, Anne Hathaway, Dwayne Johnson, Alan Arkin, and others go through the motions amiably, if not interestingly, and even Bill Murray shows up for a cameo. And for a movie by Peter Segel (*Tommy Boy, Anger Management, 50 First Dates*), *Get Smart* actually *looks* like a movie; Segel still doesn't appear to possess any visual sense, but the film is sleekly presented, and the effects appear appropriately expensive.

But all throughout, I felt something you should *never* feel at a Hollywood blockbuster that isn't meant to be scary: terror. Terror on behalf of the filmmakers, who seem so grimly determined to make a $100-million-or-bust smash that'll appeal to all demographics that they no longer know *what*

they want.

They update Agents 86 and 99 enough to make him a sweetly clueless Steve Carell type and her a young hottie, but still insist on that hoary climax that finds our hero chasing after the villains who've abducted our heroine. (At gunpoint! In front of him! And by the guy you'd *least suspect*
!) They insist on a modern-day "ironic" tone, but still ladle the schmaltzy music on top of scenes of Maxwell Smart becoming disillusioned, or 99 believing her partner to be dead. They aim for witty civility in the dialogue, but still save their comedic money shots for scenes of ultra-violence. (If I had a nickel for every time Agent 86 gets a miniature harpoon in the face ... .)

Get Smart is so wish-washy that it's practically an *embarrassment* to summertime blockbusters. It's like those plucky, minimally talented
American Idol
contestants who really,
really
want to win, and so the voting public keeps them in there through round six or so;
Get Smart
will make its money for a few weeks, we'll all move on to other matters, and in time, none of us will even remember its name.

THE LOVE GURU

Fifteen minutes after escaping *Get Smart*, I popped into a screening of the Mike Myers comedy *The Love Guru*
, and against all expectations, it cheered me up enormously. Beginning with a Morgan Freeman joke to end
all
Morgan Freeman jokes, and ending with a sprightly, candy-colored Bollywood production number, this Myers vehicle may be puerile, repetitive, and cheap (to say nothing of cheap-*looking*

), but I found it about 20 times funnier than *Get Smart*, considering that I laughed out loud at *The Love Guru* about 20 times and laughed out loud at *Get Smart* exactly once (when Alan Arkin was nearly impaled by a swordfish).

Myers' latest concerns a peppy self-help swami recruited to motivate a morose Canadian hockey player (!), and I'm not saying it's a good movie. It might be an indefensibly *bad* movie. Director Marco Schnabel's composition is lazy, the lighting atrocious, and shots are continually held for a beat and a half longer than necessary - it's editing by way of *Spaceballs*-era Mel Brooks. Beyond the aesthetics, though, many of the jokes here are stale even *before* they're repeated a dozen or so times, a little of Verne Troyer (no pun intended) goes an *awfully* long way, a promising Justin Timberlake turn is undone by the actor's ungodly accent - it's not so-bad-it's-funny, it's so-bad-it's-*really*-bad - and Jessica Alba, in a humiliating role, continues in her apparent quest to be thought of as the most abjectly worthless great-looking movie star in America.

But guess what? I don't really care. Myers pushes his comedic conceits down our throats with so much brute force that your choices here are to either succumb to his proudly juvenile antics or gag, and I did far more of the former; there are clever routines involving the guru's penchant for acronyms, the punchlines and double entendres are delivered with a wicked glee that subverts their obviousness, and there are gloriously goofy musical numbers, and clever song selections, in nearly every reel. Not for nothing, but Myers makes better use of Chris Isaak's "Baby Did a Bad Bad Thing" than Kubrick did in *Eyes Wide Shut*. Tell me he's not *some* sort of genius.