

## "Punch" and Juvie: "Sucker Punch" and "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules"

Written by Mike Schulz

Sunday, 27 March 2011 15:56

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### **SUCKER PUNCH**

In their eternal wisdom, the members of the Motion Picture Association of America's ratings board have bestowed upon Zack Snyder's *Sucker Punch* a PG-13 rating, meaning that while parental supervision for viewers age 13 and under is

*suggested*

, it's certainly not mandatory. I, for one, applaud the board's decision, and think it's marvelous that kids finally have violent fetish porn to call their own.

That's a joke. It's also one more joke than you'll find in the whole of Snyder's loud, lurid, and distasteful video-game fantasia, an action thriller that would be actively offensive if it wasn't so damned boring. The movie might appeal to the director's more fervent fanboys (there couldn't possibly be any Zack Snyder *fangirls*, could there?), but those who quickly tired of the over-deliberate, sepia-toned humorlessness of *Sucker Punch* could easily be in absolute agony here.

*Sucker Punch*

's heroine – the pouty, mini-skirted Baby Doll (Emily Browning) – is routinely browbeaten, threatened, smacked around, and worse, and she's

*still*

not treated more unfairly than the audience.

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If you didn't know that Snyder was its director, you'd probably find the film's prelude hilarious, because it comes off as a pitch-perfect *parody* of a Zack Snyder scene – lots of desaturated colors and rain and suggested atrocities, all presented in ominous (and torturous) slow-motion, and underscored to a funereal cover of Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)." This pre-title sequence lasts less than five minutes, and already

*Sucker Punch*

feels like the Zack Snyder-iest movie imaginable. But wait: Its director is just getting warmed up.

In short order, Baby Doll is mistakenly arrested for killing her sister, sent to a madhouse by her hateful, possibly incestuous stepfather, and prepared for a lobotomy, at which point she disappears into a fantasy world where the mental hospital is a brothel, her fellow inmates are high-end hookers, and her sadistic orderly is a sadistic pimp. (Still with me? Let's proceed then.) With the aid of four sisters-in-suffering (leather- and bustier-clad Abbie Cornish, Jena Malone, Vanessa Hudgens, and Jamie Chung), Baby Doll plans an escape, which can apparently only happen by her slipping into *other* fantasy worlds; she performs exotic dances that transport this makeshift Fox Force Five to faraway lands, where they collect necessary items (a map, a knife, a key) by battling skyscraper-sized monsters and fire-breathing dragons and World War I-era zombies.

Yes, I'm totally serious.

And so is *Sucker Punch's* director, who treats his and co-writer Steve Shibuya's convoluted yet moderately inventive storyline with such undue solemnity that you have almost no choice but to laugh at it. Whatever happened to the guy who directed that quick-witted 2004 remake of

*Dawn of the Dead*

? Did Snyder misplace his funny bone somewhere? Given the grimness of the prelude and loony-bin scenes, and the relentless unpleasantness of the bordello sequences (the women are constantly ogled and groped by fat, sweaty mouth-breathers with bad skin), you'd think the film's spirit would finally lighten when the ladies, or their avatars, start kicking ass in Baby Doll's imagination. These set pieces, though, are just as dour, and devoid of tension and excitement, as everything that precedes and follows them. If you somehow blended

*Shutter Island, I Spit on Your Grave,*

and

*Scott Pilgrim Vs. the World*

and excised the mystery, laughs, and irony, you'd be left with

*Sucker Punch*

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Snyder has a gift for imagery; shots involving a zeppelin and the mama dragon to beat all mama dragons are legitimately breathtaking, and even the early appearance of the film's title, written in raindrops, is beautifully rendered. But his sluggish pacing and overtly stylized compositions suck all the life out of his performers, several of whom – not that you'd know it from *this* film – are quite talented. (Only Cornish and Carla Gugino, as a Polish nurse/choreographer/house madam, occasionally transcend their insulting roles.) And while it's borderline amusing when Scott Glenn, as some sort of mystical guru, engages in video-game-speak before the women's first fantasy melee – instructions, pithy remark, caveat – it's far less so when he returns to go through this exact same routine again. And  
*again*

*Sucker Punch*

may be designed as an assault on your senses, but its weapon of choice, sadly, is tedium.



### **DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: RODRICK RULES**

I don't want to oversell it, because it's really nothing more than a light, zippy family comedy, but after the forced mayhem of *Sucker Punch*, I found the cheerful nonsense of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules*

enormously enjoyable. It's not as consistently clever as last year's Jeff Kinney adaptation, but director David Bowers' follow-up is still terrifically fresh and funny, and wonderfully generous to its cast of pint-size comedians (Zachary Gordon and Robert Capron, especially) and the sensational teen actor Devon Bostick. Sequel-exhaustion aside, here's hoping that filmmakers get to work on a third

*Wimpy Kid*

before its cast dives too deeply into puberty; what's not to love about a film that finds a pre-teen nerd mooning over a schoolmate by saying, "She's almost as pretty as my

*mom*

"?"