

## "Scary Movie 3" an Improvement, but Not Clever Enough: Also, "Runaway Jury" and "Radio"

Written by Mike Schulz

Tuesday, 28 October 2003 18:00

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### **SCARY MOVIE 3**

With *Scary Movie 3*, the assignment of directing has been passed from Keenen Ivory Wayans to *Airplane!*'s David Zucker, which is a big step forward right there. (Zucker isn't much of a director, either, but at least he has ideas on how to shape a scene, and is actually pretty adept at making his film parodies *look* like the films they're parodying.) Plus, any time Zucker and company are satirizing the outrageous pomposity of M. Night Shymalan, whose

*Signs*

receives – and deserves – particularly harsh treatment here,

*Scary Movie 3*

is everything you want a movie spoof to be: smart, funny, and more than a little mean. (And heartening – until now, I thought I was the only one who detested Shymalan's "Hitchcockian" appearance as the vet who accidentally kills Mel Gibson's wife in

*Signs*

.) The wide-eyed, appealing Anna Faris returns as the lead, ably satirizing Naomi Watts' reporter from

*The Ring*

, and comic actors such as Charlie Sheen, Jeremy Piven, Queen Latifah, Camryn Manheim, and legendary spoofster Leslie Nielsen all score some laughs. So why is

*Scary Movie 3*

still so disappointing?

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Probably because, with the exception of the scenes that bash Shymalan's portentousness, none of the movie's parodies seems to have a *point*. Take, for example, the endless spoof of *8 Mile*

, which is easily

*Scary Movie 3*

's worst sequence. Up until its unfunny punchline, in which the hood of the wannabe rapper's sweatshirt resembles something a Klansman might sport, Zucker and writers Craig Mazin and Pat Proft don't satirize

*8 Mile*

so much as

*mimic*

it, albeit in heightened form – the rapper vomits (on someone); gets a pep talk from his best friend (who hits on him); outraps his opponent by making fun of his own white-boy act (by referencing Martha Stewart and Dr. Phil). In this scene, and in the film's parodies of

*The Ring*

and

*The Matrix Reloaded*

, too, Zucker and company are merely doing what Keenan Ivory and the innumerable Wayans clan did in the first two installments – congratulating the audience for seeing the same movies the Wayans did. That may be flattering to many viewers, but it serves no comedic purpose whatsoever. (In the movie's rehash of the notorious

*Matrix Reloaded*

sequence involving The Architect and the hallway of TV screens, couldn't the filmmakers have created something fresher than an excuse for another unfunny George Carlin cameo?) There are good repeat gags all throughout

*Scary Movie 3*

– the best, surprisingly, involves the film's Haley Joel Osment clone (impressively straight-faced Drew Mikuska) being treated like a human punching bag – but nearly every time the film saddles up for another extended movie parody the laughs dry up.

Zucker is, however, a master in one area: Like Mel Brooks once upon a time, he knows how to space the film's big gut-busters to make you *think* you've been laughing continuously over the course of 85 minutes. (His bookending is very shrewd: It opens terrifically with a who's-the-dumber-blonde? battle between Pamela Anderson and Jenny McCarthy, and closes with an enjoyable take-off on

*Final*

*Destination*

's

most shocking murder.) And it was certainly a smart move to parody works that take themselves far too seriously, as opposed to the previous entries' spoofs of movies –

*Scream*

,  
*I Know What You Did Last Summer*

– that were spoofs to begin with. As an innocuous, hit-or-miss time-waster,

*Scary Movie 3*

is amusing enough, I guess, and God knows it's better than the two films that preceded it. But

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it's just clever enough to make you realize it's not  
*nearly*  
clever enough.



### ***RUNAWAY JURY***

*Runaway Jury* is a typical John Grisham adaptation, which means that the heroes are ethically challenged but morally upright, the villains are just a twirly moustache away from being complete cardboard cutouts, and the legal machinations fall somewhere between screwball comedy and science fiction. And yet it's still sorta entertaining, because melodramatic courtroom dramas always provide some fun, and good casts always show up for these things. Apart from the tense prologue setting up the plot-propelling crime, there's nothing to talk about in *Runaway Jury* apart from the cast; director Gary Fleder wisely gets out of their way and simply lets 'em chomp on the ridiculous material. John Cusack and Rachel Weisz are in fine form, but a nicely relaxed Dustin Hoffman and an amusingly vicious Gene Hackman take top acting honors; maybe in their next collaboration we'll get them onscreen together for more than three minutes.



### ***RADIO***

I was going to write a lengthy screed about the odiousness that is *Radio*, but a couple of years back I already did one on the loathsome

*I Am Sam*

, so I'll save my energies this time around. If there's a film genre I detest more than

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pseudo-inspirational tales of the impaired and infirm teaching the rest of us Important Life Lessons, I can't imagine what it would be. (Yes,

*Rain Man*

and

*Awakenings*

and

*Philadelphia*

, this includes you.) What I hate most about works of this sort is that they take genuinely inspirational stories –

*Radio*

is based on the true tale of a mentally challenged Southerner, nicknamed Radio, who becomes a football-worshipping town's unofficial mascot – and remove all traces of real-life complexity; to make sure that no one misses the point of how the suffering hero is Better Than the Rest of Us, *everything*

in these films is laid out with maximum obviousness. (It's not enough that

*Radio*

's villain happens to be the father of the football team's head bully, but he's also a *banker*

. Boo! Hiss!) Many will say that

*Radio*

is a movie "for the whole family," but its filmmakers make us

*all*

feel like first-graders.

Awards-night benefits aside, it's easy to see why material of this ilk appeals to actors – Who could resist the chance to be universally beloved? – but watching Cuba Gooding Jr. enact the title character's handicaps is, for some of us, a grisly experience; Gooding's tireless quest for audience approval is shameless, like the human personification of a three-legged puppy. (If he thought it would win our love, Gooding would happily lick our faces.) Though competently amassed, *Radio* embraces every nauseating cliché of its genre – the condescension, the overused visual metaphors, the relentless speechifying ("We haven't been teaching Radio, he's been teaching us.") – and humiliates its talented cast. (Based on their work here, you'd never know that Ed Harris, Alfre Woodard, and Debra Winger were three of the finest actors our country has produced.) None of this will much matter to the easily affected viewers who gamely cheer Radio's victories and empathetically weep at his losses; with James Horner's embarrassing (and insanely derivative) score egging them on at all times, the film's blatant manipulation is as offensive as its treatment of the leading character. But when will mass audiences realize that movies like *Radio* are treating *them* like lovable half-wits, too?