

Always Mr. Nice 'Guy'



Stiles and Lee can't get it together in "A Guy Thing."

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZAP2IT.COM

by Daniel J. Stasiewski
A&E Editor

While a normal raunch comedy would bombard its audience with in-your-face boob and fart jokes, some excessively unsubtle humor could have helped "A Guy Thing." That's not to say gross-out jokes are a great addition to every film, but this tentative romantic comedy makes too many unsuccessful attempts at being edgy.

Combined with a tepid love story, this boring attempt at a twenty-something "American Pie" is as restrained and unfunny as a nun trying to tell a dirty joke.

The morning after his bachelor party, groom-to-be Paul Morse (Jason Lee) wakes up with a Tiki dancer (Julia Stiles) in his bed. Assuming he cheated, Paul quickly shuffles the girl out of his apartment just moments before his fiancée Sarah (Selma Blair) shows up. Paul blames any peculiar behavior on a hang-over and is able to hide his impromptu slumber party from his future wife.

Paul quickly seeks advice from every guy he knows, but even his brother, who lusts after Sarah, tells him to keep the secret and get married. Reluctantly, Paul agrees until he finds out the girl in his bed was actually Sarah's cousin Becky.

It doesn't take long for Paul to confront Becky, especially since the family tie makes a confession inevitable. When Becky tells Paul they only slept in the same bed, Paul is relieved at first, but discovers the idea of cheating was actually a way of becoming free. Soon, Paul reexamines his entire relationship and begins to see Becky as the spontaneous person he always wanted.

"A Guy Thing" begins at Paul's bachelor party. The usually high-spirited, often-wild pre-wedding tradition comes off as incompetently low-key. The most outrageous part of the entire party is when Jason Lee's character allows his best man to act as the groom. It's this devastating trepidation that sets the tone of the film.

At least Paul will eventually admit he is boring, but his un-wavering dullness is apparent in even in his fantasies where he

can be anything he wants. Any contact in his fantasies (usually someone beating the hell out of someone else) looks more playful than dangerous. And that is what his fantasies should try to avoid since he is, in the real world, a by-the-book kind of guy.

But how by-the-book is a guy who gets crabs and scratches his crotch with a presentation pointer in front of a group of board members? This is where a rift occurs that I just don't understand. Jason Lee isn't a sex symbol, yet his boyish sensitivity allows for a romantic role to be all too believable, charming even. When's attempting to charm us with a ten-minute diarrhea gag that ends up dying a slow and painful death, his ability to romanticize the story is flushed down the toilet.

Lee's co-star Julia Stiles is treated just as unfairly. Her character is first portrayed as a clumsy bimbo; a role the confident and dramatic Stiles has trouble pulling off. Stiles' grace and agility as an actress is thrown to the waste side for an awkward klutz usually reserved for Sandra Bullock. Stiles soon becomes a fearless and intelligent woman, only to then be transformed into a meek little girl. Her character's foundation is as solid as the rest of the pillow soft plot.

It's quite obvious that Stiles and Lee end up together. Lee has a supposed epiphany at the altar in a hackneyed storybook fashion and calls it all off for Stiles. Still, Lee doesn't change, Stiles doesn't charm, and the jokes don't entertain. "A Guy Thing" ends just as it began: safe, insipid, and utterly spineless. Maybe if Lee had violated a pie it all would have been worth it. But, all we got was crabs.

★ 1/2
out of
4 stars

'A Guy Thing,' directed by Chris Koch, starring Jason Lee, Julia Stiles, and Selma Blair, is currently showing at Tinsletown.

Sundance promotes alternatives to Hollywood mix

By Duane Dudek
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

The Golden Globes and the Sundance Film Festival seem to represent drastically different constituencies, but, in fact, they do intersect.

Golden Globe winner Nicole Kidman and Golden Globe nominee Julianne Moore have both been in films at the festival, and nominee Maggie Gyllenhaal is hosting the festival's closing ceremonies Saturday. And Hollywood royalty such as Dustin Hoffman, Katie Holmes and Al Pacino can be seen on the screen and on the street here.

Festival founder Robert Redford personifies this synergy.

His struggles in Hollywood convinced him of the need for a home where artists with vision could be nurtured, and his success in Hollywood helped him build it. He founded the festival in 1985 with 40 films and has seen explosive growth since.

Today, he is largely a figurehead, others pick the films shown here, but for 10 days each January, he is king of Sundance.

Sunday, on the festival's fourth day, he followed an announcement of a program to bring independent films to Loews Theater multiplexes starting this year with an interview on a wide range of subjects, including arts, politics and his own career.

Redford said he made himself accessible "to remind people of who we are, what we are doing and why we are doing it."

But he also did so, he said, because he sensed a "nervousness out there about the political climate" and felt a need to stress the relationship between "independent film and freedom of expression."

Debate and dissent, Redford said, are now being treated as "unpatriotic, and I think that's dangerous." Fear became "a factor in the marketplace" after Sept. 11,



KRT PHOTO BY LIONEL HAHN/ABACA PRESS
Actor and Sundance founder Robert Redford

he said, when "some films were pulled off the schedules" because they "might rock the boat politically."

If it's bad business to put out a film that's unpatriotic, that's business and politics combining to stifle freedom of expression, Redford said. "My own personal opinion is to let the audience decide."

If Redford sounds like a politician, he is, of sorts. He is planning to direct and star in a sequel to his 1972 film "The Candidate," playing the same character now in office and set "exactly as much later as it is." But a real political life doesn't interest him.

"It's a system I don't think I could survive in," he said. "I have the wrong temperament for it. I'm very political, I exercise my rights as a citizen, and I'm interested in the issues of our times."

But, he added, he loves making films: "I see myself as an artist, (not as) a businessman or politician."

His upcoming art includes "The Clearing," an "intelligent thriller, rather dark," in which he stars with Willem Dafoe; a Western called "The Outrider"; and a film with Lasse Hallstrom. He also will be directing a film on George Washington: "Time and Again," a project he has tried to make for 20 years, based on a book by Jack Finney with a script by Kenneth Lonergan; and "The Sea of Green," a drama based on an upcoming book about radical political fugitives.

Redford believes "the principal purpose" of the films at Sundance, and films in general, "is to entertain. And if you have a social, cultural or political" message to interject, "it should be couched within the frame of entertainment."

And if it's getting harder to tell Sundance and the Golden Globes apart, Redford views this development "as a sort of acceptance of what we've done right."

Sundance's growing popularity, he said, means that people are drawn by the chance to see films "they can't see anywhere else, and, in that sense, (these alternative films) become kind of commercial. It's interesting."

What's important at the festival "is the mix," Redford said.

"We're not saying that Hollywood isn't any good," he said. "We're just saying there are other films that we want you to see."

ABC using big game to promote 'Alias,' 'Jimmy Kimmel Live'

By Ed Bark
The Dallas Morning News

previously guided Rosie O'Donnell's daytime show, doesn't expect too much smooth sailing.

"It will seem bumpy probably to a lot of you guys, and you'll say it's sloppy and slapped together," Kellison predicts. "And maybe part of that will be true, but ultimately that's the nature of a live show."

Kimmel will deploy weekly guest hosts (the first is Snoop Dogg) as well as his real-life Uncle Frank in the role of "security guard." The house band is led by Kimmel's childhood friend, Cleto Escobedo Jr., whose six-piece ensemble includes his father, Cleto Sr.

A-list guests have been elusive so far. A handful of confirmed bookings include Bernie Mac and Don King.

"I'm not looking to slay people when they come out here," Kimmel says. "But if somebody's the eighth most famous person on 'Celebrity Mole: Hawaii,' we're going to talk about that. ... It's different, because on 'The Man Show' and 'Win Ben Stein's Money,' I didn't have to pretend to be interested in the person next to me."

Whatever emerges, it won't be a facsimile of Jay Leno's "Tonight Show."

Ratings-impaired ABC hopes to put a better foot forward this week by using Super Bowl XXXVII to kick off a new Monday night lineup, a special episode of "Alias" and a chancy late night talk show. Expect to see lots of "Dragnet" promos, too.

Using the big game as a promotional platform is business as usual, but seldom to this extent. Here are the stakes:

Sunday's contest between Oakland and Tampa Bay will leave a big audience available for a post-game episode of "Alias." The second-year spy drama is still struggling in the ratings despite generally favorable reviews and ABC's best efforts to trumpet its slinky star, Jennifer Garner. A Super Bowl backwash should give "Alias" at least twice as many viewers as the 9.3 million it's currently averaging on Sundays.

Later the same night, ABC will walk its first high-wire with Jimmy Kimmel. The former co-host of "The Man Show" will be dangerously live from the El Capitan Entertainment Centre on Hollywood Boulevard. Sunday's showcase is a preview of the controversial comic's new weeknightly adventures in a post-"Nightline" time slot.

"There's no question we'll be cleaner than 'The Man Show,'" he says from the set of "Jimmy Kimmel Live." "But it'll still be dirtier than any of the other (late-night) shows."

More on him later. ABC also will use the Super Bowl to push a new "Super Monday" lineup of "Veritas: The Quest," "The Practice" (transplanted from Sundays in a risky move) and "Miracles." Then next Sunday comes a new version of "Dragnet" starring "Married ... With Children's" Ed O'Neill as clip-lipped Sgt. Joe Friday.

Kimmel's show, produced by his Jackhole Industries in partnership with Disney's Touchstone Television, is easily ABC's biggest crapshoot. He does have an important friend in a high place, though. ABC Entertainment Television Group chairman Lloyd Braun has staked his reputation, and perhaps his future with the network, on his firm belief that Kimmel will prove to be a long-running late-night sensation. If so, it would heal the deep wounds Braun suffered after failing to lure David Letterman from CBS.

"He and I are very much in love," Kimmel jokes, referring to Braun. "I don't think it's any secret that Lloyd has a very personal interest in the show." Braun's immediate objective is to lower expectations.

"As good as Jimmy's going to be on Sunday night, he's gonna be raw," he says. "He's going live after the Super Bowl, and he's human. A week after his first show, he's going to be five times better."

"As long as the show progresses, we're in it for the long haul," Braun adds. "You don't go with somebody like Jimmy, who is a relative unknown, and at the same time have some kind of short trigger."

Going live on a nightly basis could be akin to playing with dynamite. Executive producer Daniel Kellison, who

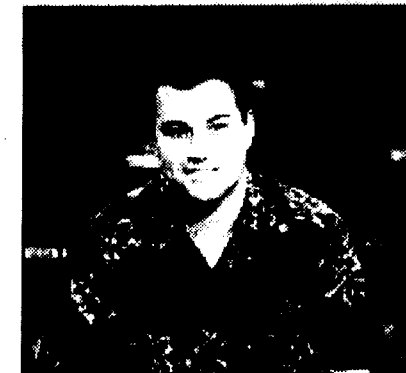


PHOTO COURTESY OF CANADA.COM
Jimmy Kimmel looks to liven up late night.

"They were not happy when I told TV Guide that I was going to do a comedy version of 'The Tonight Show,'" Kimmel says.

He's still hoping to juice his studio audience with free alcoholic drinks, but ABC is resisting that idea.

"It's always our intent to get people as drunk as possible," Kimmel says. "We're trying to work it out legally. But we'll have heroin needles and stuff back there."

But seriously, folks ...

"You probably haven't been to a show in L.A. as a regular studio audience member, but it's pretty miserable," Kimmel explains. "It doesn't matter if it's raining or what's going on. You stand out there for three hours. They poke you with cattle prods to get in and then you're forced to laugh and applaud at certain times. I want to make it more of an evening out where people actually enjoy themselves from the beginning until the end. And most shows aren't like that. It's pretty brutal."

Off- or on-air, it seems clear that no show will be quite like "Jimmy Kimmel Live." Now it's all up to the freewheeling host to play bumper cars while at the same time avoiding a train wreck.

"I'm still sitting in my bedroom at home going, 'Geez, I don't know if I can do this,'" he says. "It's a weird situation to be in. And I guess we'll all find out."

LEB Movie of the Week: 'Red Dragon'



Hopkins returns as Hannibal Lecter in 'Red Dragon'

(2 1/2 stars out of 4)

Despite the impeccable casting of Ed Norton as an FBI profiler and Anthony Hopkins as psycho-killer Hannibal Lecter, this film that is both the prequel to "Silence of the Lambs" and a remake of the effective 1986 thriller "Manhunter," loses its fire midway, nearly flickering out by its perfunctory conclusion. As serial killer Francis Dolarhyde, Ralph Fiennes is oddly toothless, approximately as menacing as a Ralph Lauren model. 2 hrs. 06 R (violence, gore, nudity, sexual candor) — Carrie Rickey, Knight Rider News.

'Red Dragon' will be showing Jan. 30 at 9:30 p.m. and Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 at 10 p.m. in Reed 117.