

THE TV SET

THE TV SET is yet another entertainment industry satire written and directed by yet another industry insider (in this case, Jake Kasdan, director of the beloved television show FREAKS AND GEEKS). But luckily for us, THE TV SET is more than just another addition to a genre that has grown staler than Sunday night's episode of ENTOURAGE. It lands a solid triple axel: it is funny and touching without being precious.

David Duchovny plays Mike, a veteran TV writer, whose script, THE WEXLER CHRONICLES, is being filmed as a pilot for "The Panda," a network flush with the success of their current show SLUT WARS. Mike needs the network to like his show: his wife (Justine Bateman) is pregnant with their second child. It is time for that steady paycheck.

Mike hopes to earn that check while maintaining the integrity of his script. His biggest obstacle is the network president, Lenny (all hail Sigourney Weaver). Lenny never had to drink the network Kool-Aid; it courses through her veins naturally. Mike's only potential ally is Richard, a BBC transplant recently hired to help class up the network. Even though he is British, he is still a network executive. When Lenny explains during a casting session that she prefers one of the actresses, "because her cuteness doesn't get in the way of her hotness," Richard nods along. But then again, so does Mike.

The question is not whether Mike's willing to bend, it's how far he can go without breaking. His placating manager (Judy Greer, giving a standout performance in a movie littered with great ones) assures him that everything will be all right, a lie Mike pays her to tell him. It is clear from that get-go that nothing will be all right: the network hates Mike's first choice for the lead, Mike's back starts to seize up, and his script is picked apart and put back together by Lenny and her fourteen-year-old daughter (who, a network suit notes, "has great instincts").

Unlike STUDIO 60, that annoyingly serious television show about making television, THE TV SET does not try to equate making television with curing cancer or even making a movie. It is smart enough to know that the stakes are actually pretty small. After cutting a ridiculously bad version of his own pilot for the network, Mike says he knows his script is not Shakespeare; hell, it's not even the Sopranos. But it is his.

Most of us have small lives, but they are ours. As we get older, we shrink our dreams down to a manageable size, and then we compromise whatever shreds remain. THE TV SET tells a story we have heard many times but never honestly. It is a small film, but one with the integrity to acknowledge that the creators of our pop culture are really not so different from us, all those little people out there in the dark.