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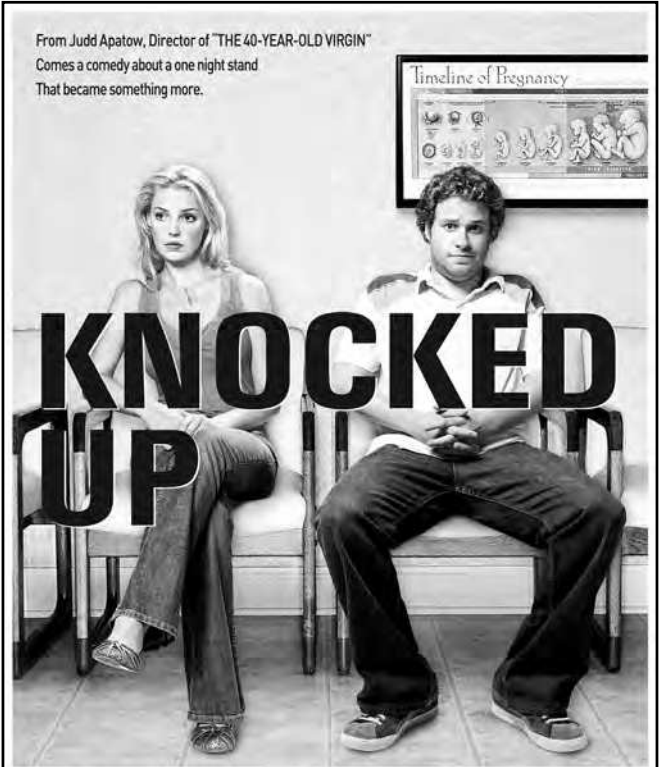
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**OPENS NATIONWIDE ON JUNE 1**



## movies BY JASON BLAIR



David Duchovny in *The TV Set*

## Pilot Season

Television is no place for a writer

**THE TV SET:** Written and directed by Jake Kasdan. Cinematography, Uta Briesewitz. Music, Michael Andrews. Starring David Duchovny, Sigourney Weaver, Ioan Gruffudd, Judy Greer, Lindsay Stone and Justine Bateman. THINKFilm, 2007. R. 87 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

With his pale skin, full beard and flannel shirt, it's clear that Mike Klein (David Duchovny) is either mentally ill or a writer. It turns out he's a little of both. Mike is the author of *The Wexler Chronicles*, a pilot for network television that, if all goes well, could be the next *Seinfeld*. But one look at Mike tells you that all won't go well: He's exactly the kind of intelligent, principled guy that Hollywood executives routinely grind to pieces. But it's here that *The TV Set* surprises. If director Jake Kasdan (*Zero Effect*) has a point to make, it's that the television industry isn't in the business of destroying. Instead, it's in the business of developing mediocrity. Thus, over the course of several weeks and months, Mike undergoes a soul-vaporizing process during which his beloved idea — a bittersweet series about his brother's suicide — is slowly transformed into *Two and Half Men*-type claptrap that will ensure robust ad sales for years to come.

Chiefly responsible for the network schedule is Lenny (Sigourney Weaver), an archetypal network president. Savvy, demonstrative and impossible to negotiate with, Lenny is the chief purveyor of the vaguely threatening communication style that makes *The TV Set* so enjoyable. She's constantly expressing her "concerns" to Mike just after heaping praise on his work. It's confusing until you realize it's not Mike she disdains; rather, she despises literate culture in general. Hence her odd affection for *Shut Wars*, the new star of the fall TV schedule. Her loathing for intelligent material is best expressed during a

brief exchange with her boss (a sharp cameo by Philip Baker Hall). Referring to *The Wexler Chronicles*, Lenny says, "It's just so fucking arty and ... smart." To which Baker Hall replies after a beat, "I'm sure you'll rein it in."

Weaver alone makes *The TV Set* worth viewing. She hasn't been this loose — or this sinister — in years. In fact, it's somewhat surprising to see her in this tiny little satire of network television. She's the most conspicuous example of a highly recognizable and effective cast that is close to being more than the material deserves. That's because there's little originality in *The TV Set* other than a fresh take on an old idea; namely, that broadcast television is a cultural wasteland and that TV worships at the altar of commercialism while promoting an anti-experimental agenda. But everyone involved in *The TV Set* — from the un-reassuring light technician Hutch (M.C. Gainey, *Sideways*) to Lenny's British creative director Richard (Ioan Gruffud, *Fantastic Four*) — is spot-on. That includes Duchovny, who faked his way through a decade of *The X-Files* but gives a nuanced performance here.

*The TV Set* is weakest when it tries to suggest that Richard and Mike's wives are somehow surprised by the difficulties of developing a series — to the point that one withdraws her support. It makes the women appear desperate and naïve, something they clearly aren't. What's more, the scope of the film isn't large enough to examine complex relationships in any meaningful way. But if you're looking for a little lighthearted comedy with an almost suspiciously strong cast, *The TV Set* will reward you. **EW**

The TV Set opens Friday, May 25, at the Bijou.

**EUGENE WEEKLY'S  
SUMMER  
EVENTS**

**ISSUE MAY 31, 2007**



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