

'Mallrats' fails to capture rude edge



Four years ago Kevin Smith sold his comic book collection to help fund his \$23,000 debut feature, "Clerks." Not only has he probably been able to buy it back; he's snagged Marvel Comics legend Stan Lee for

The new film should be a similar dream come true for fans of Smith's rude, raw brand of humor. But while "Mallrats" tries hard to recapture that edge, the rags fall mostly flat.

Broddie and T.S. are a pair of twentysomething ladabouts who live at the local shopping mall, buying comic books, eating at the food court, and pondering the meaning of life. Coincidentally they've just been dumped by their girlfriends and spend the rest of the film trying to win them back.

Played by skateboard champ Jason Lee and "Dazed and Confused" star Jeremy London, these are extensions of Dante and Randy, the convenience store employees from "Clerks." Brodie, whose latest invention is a "stink hand" handshake, walks a thin line between offensive sociopath and oddly endearing social critic.

They enlist the help of Jay and Silent Bob, a pair of obnoxious, slightly menacing drug dealers from the previous film. Wearing the same backwards baseball caps and rock T-shirts, they devise elaborate Wile E. Coyote-style plans to destroy a live television taping.

Their bungling leads to some of the film's funniest moments. Chased by security guards and trapped in a dead end corridor, the dynamic duo shoots a Bat hook into the rafters and jetison

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to safety. Meanwhile, Silent Bob (played by director Smith) believes he can move objects with his mind.

One of the girlfriends is played by Shannon Doherty, enjoying her first big screen opportunity since leaving the cast of "Beverly Hills 90210." Though hardly a career-saving part, she's not bad, though Smith can't help but plant an inside joke when someone recognizes her as Brenda.

Mostly the movie suffers from overkill. Stan Lee almost embarrasses himself in a much-too-lengthy cameo where he talks about his comic book heroes as reactions to a lost love. Character actor Michael Rooker has a thankless part as a shaved-head comic foil for our heroes.

Even the best running gag — a lumpy guy camps out in front of one of those irritating 3-D Magic Eye displays where everyone can see the sailboat but him — doesn't know how to deliver a satisfying payoff. Like most of the movie, it just repeats itself and then tries away.

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At the Mall: Jason Lee, left, and Jeremy London play friends who lose their girlfriends at the mall in "Mallrats."

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only one to be done in by the resounding blandness of the local shopping center. At least "Mallrats" is better than the Woody Allen-Bette Midler turkey "Scenes from a Mall" — though just barely.

What previously played as breezy and slice-of-life now comes off too self-consciously clever. Even Jay and Silent Bob have lost their edge, transformed, as the opening credits suggest, into comparatively cuddly comic book characters.

In his defense, Smith isn't the

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