

Janitor-turned-sleuth schtick tanks

By Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice
 Hollywood certainly didn't waste any time in turning out its first insulting blaxploitation flick of 2007. Cedric the Entertainer stars as Jake Rodgers, a janitor for a video game manufacturer who ends up unconscious in a hotel room with a dead FBI Agent and a briefcase containing \$250,000 after being hit over head by a mysterious assailant.



Cedric the Entertainer stars as Jake Rodgers in the forgettable "Code Name: The Cleaner."

The plot thickens right off the bat when Jake awakens with amnesia which leaves him very open to the suggestions of a couple of scheming women with diametrically-opposed intentions. First, Diane (Nicollette Sheridan) convinces him that they're married and whisks him away to a sprawling mansion equipped with a butler (Robert Clarke) ready to wait on him hand and foot.

In truth, she's in cahoots with a gang of crooks who are after an altered computer chip that they think Jake has in his possession.

Later, a triangle of sorts evolves when a waitress named Gina (Lucy Liu) shows up claiming to be his mistress.

Truth be told, she's actually an undercover agent who's also out to find the aforementioned chip before it can be used for evil purposes.

This promising premise, which was lifted from both "The Bourne Identity" (2002) and "Memento" (2000), probably makes "Code Name: The Cleaner" sound, on paper, a lot better than the lousy fish-out-of-water comedy served up on the screen.

Unfortunately, the movie

is one of those pump-and-dump productions which puts all the best jokes in the trailers, hoping to milk the most it can opening weekend before word of mouth spreads.

So, if you've caught the commercial where Cedric

explains his wearing clogs and lederhosen this way: "Haven't you heard of Dutch chocolate?" before yodeling "Ricola!" then you're already familiar with the film's funniest scene.

Less amusing is the endlessly demeaning dialogue coming out of the mouths of Black characters.

For instance, when Jake is offered a job as an FBI Agent, he declines, opting to remain a janitor because, he says: "Somebody needs to keep this place clean. That's what I do."

Yet, he is simultaneously shown to have a serious character flaw because in the end he still steals the quarter-million dollars he found.

Fellow custodian Ronnie (DeRay Davis) constantly raps about the virtue of attending to toilets. And an African-American shrew named Jacuzzi (Niecy Nash) is heard complaining, "A sister's not happy, if her hair's nappy," implying that

having straight hair is imperative to feel good about yourself. This point is only emphasized by the fact that she's not a love interest, but merely an annoying loud-mouth who gets locked in a trunk and forgotten.

Meanwhile, Cedric goes gaga over the seductive blonde, screaming euphorically, "I'm rich and married to a White woman!"

But he's too aroused to figure out that he's being played by her. Plus, he's lusting just as much after Gina, an attractive Asian.

What message is a movie trying to send out when its Black leading man is a bumbling buffoon who dismisses sisters out of hand and can't control himself around females of other colors; and when the rest of the Black characters behave crudely and as if they hate themselves?

Code Name: The Minstrel Coon Show!

Poor (0 stars). Rated PG-13 for sensuality, crude humor, and violence.

Jay-Z

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 a college classmate who "had a terrible cocaine and crack habit. She's was just like 'I need money' and I said, 'Give me your car — \$150.'"

Apparently, Hollywood has been good to Perez, who said she now drives a Volvo and a Range Rover.

Lachey, who gained fame as a member of boy band 98 Degrees, said his first car growing up in Cincinnati was a 1981 Toyota Corolla hatchback "full of rust." He now has a car and a truck — brands not disclosed.

"I'm lucky to have a little of both worlds and do whatever you feel like driving that day," Lachey said.

Injury claimed at show

CHICAGO (AP) - A woman is suing Oprah Winfrey's studio, alleging she was injured in a rush for seats during a taping of the talk show host's syndicated TV show.

Tayna Milner said she was pushed down stairs between a waiting area and audience seating at Harpo Studios on April 11, according to the lawsuit filed in Cook County Cir-

cuit Court recently.

Her lawsuit accuses the studio in Chicago's West Loop neighborhood of failing to properly control the crowd, which caused Milner to fall and suffer unspecified injuries, the *Chicago Tribune* reported on its website. Milner is seeking more than \$50,000 in damages.

Hundreds try out to dance for diva

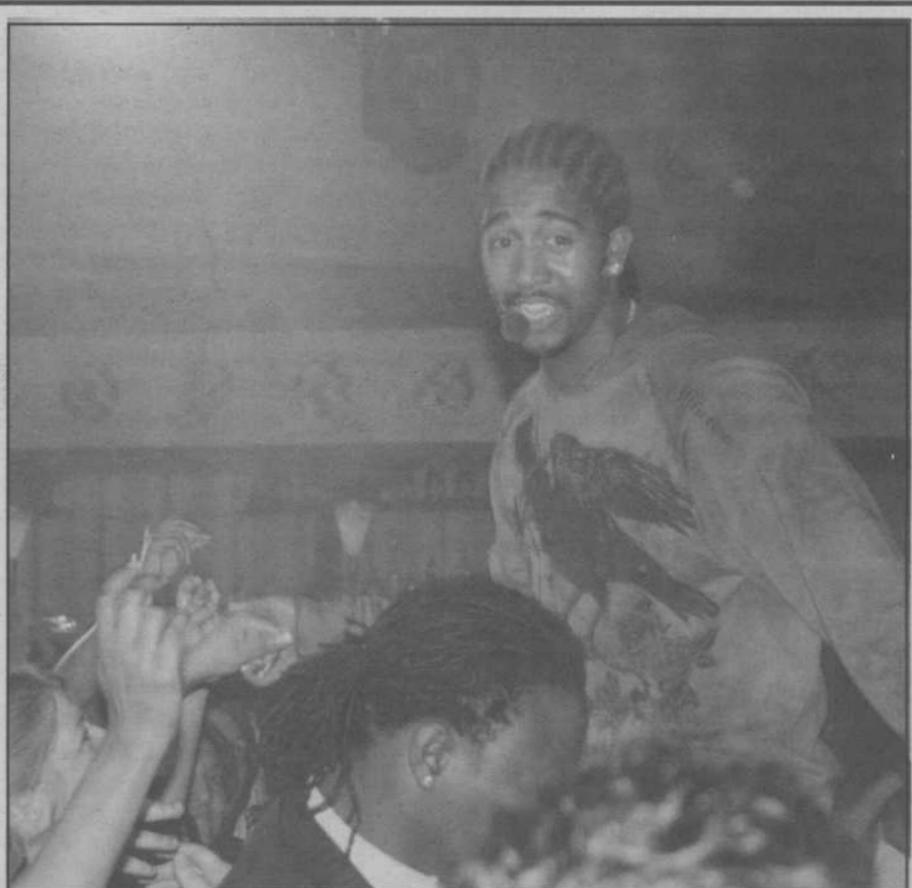
HOUSTON (AP) - A nationwide talent search for dancers fleet-footed enough to back up Beyonce Knowles came to the pop diva's hometown as hundreds turned out to audition for 40 open slots.

The would-be performers took turns Saturday moving through choreographed routines to such Beyonce hits as "Deja vu," while cameras recorded their footwork and choreographer Frank Gaston studied their style.

Houston was the third location in the cross-country search, following auditions in Atlanta and Los Angeles. After two more stops, in New York and Chicago, Gaston and Beyonce will review the tapes.

There will be 30 finalists from each city. The finalists get a trip to either New York or Los Angeles, where the numbers will be pared to the final 40.

The selected dancers will earn \$1,500 to \$3,000 a week and get extensive exposure at Beyonce's performances, said Gaston, who choreographs Beyonce's videos and has worked with En Vogue and Toni Braxton.



OH, OMARION

R&B heartthrob Omarion grabs the hand of a female admirer while he sings. The Southern California singer blossomed into a star after he embarked on a solo career. He was in town Friday for a performance at OPM Nightclub inside Caesars Palace.

Photo special to the Sentinel-Voice by Jaycee Selmon

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