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MOVIE REVIEW

## Gamer

The Boston Globe

Despite all the flash and action, 'Gamer' features too much control



Gerard Butler plays a prisoner named Kable, the star combatant in a brutal online game. (Saeed Adyani/Lionsgate)

By Tom Russo

Globe Correspondent / September 5, 2009

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If you've caught either of the hyperactive "Crank" movies, the last thing you'd expect from the filmmaking team of Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor (or "Neveldine/Taylor," as they aggressively brand themselves) is a boring ride. Yet for long stretches of the PlayStation-minded "Gamer," the action does drag. The duo goes lighter on the anything-goes screwiness that's really their creative redemption, and instead focuses on the sort of "legit" grittiness that didn't do much for "Terminator Salvation," either.

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#### GAMER

Written and directed by:  
Neveldine/TaylorStarring: Gerard Butler, Michael C.  
Hall, Logan Lerman, and Amber  
VallettaAt: Boston Common, Fenway,  
suburbs

For a guy whose image remains that of a hard-rockin' leader of men thanks to "300," Gerard Butler sure lacks inspiring moments as Kable, the star combatant in a brutal online game called "Slayers," in which real-life convicts serve as brain-jacked avatars for players at home. (As much as the movie appears to be trying to beat James Cameron's "Avatar" or this month's "Surrogates" to the punch, the premise is actually more just a beta version of "Death Race.") Butler's gladiator has a family he longs to get back to, if he can survive enough rounds of the game to earn a pardon. But save for a quick, early moment in which we glimpse the nerve-jangling command delay between Kable and his spoiled-toon controller (Logan Lerman), "Gamer" is

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Running time: 95 minutes

Rated R (frenetic sequences of strong brutal violence throughout, sexual content, nudity, and language)

teen controller (Logan Lerman) - "Turn me around," Kable growls - the game sequences are all familiar flash, and zero tension. Like Butler, John Leguizamo is wasted here in a pointless cameo as a fellow con; ditto for Kyra Sedgwick as an Oprah-ish TV personality and closet Kable groupie.

The directors try to get provocative at points, speculating about the potential moral slipperiness of their out-there science. Far smoother gear-shifting comes elsewhere. An initial loopy look at "Socials," the candy-colored "Sims"-esque experience that preceded "Slayers," whizzes by tantalizingly quickly. A climactic confrontation between Kable and the slyly grinning tech billionaire behind the game (Michael C. Hall of "Dexter," in the one performance of note) is full of lackeys getting their bones crunched - juxtaposed with Hall's character leading them in a jazzy Sammy Davis Jr. dance number. It's only when Neveldine and Taylor seem to be weighing some odd-fitting element and impulsively deciding, *Annnh, why not*, that the movie powers up fully. ■

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