

## Blu-Ray Review: 'Shorts' Long on Comic Chaos, Short on Charm

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 3, 2009 - 8:57pm

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CHICAGO – Robert Rodriguez is a one-man moviemaking machine. He's always looking for the fastest and most cost-effective ways for getting his work out to the public. His success story, memorably chronicled in the book "Rebel Without a Crew," is genuinely inspiring, yet his films often fail to resonate as anything other than exercises in design. In his latest film, he comes up with two multi-purpose objects (a man-made product, "the black box," and a magical "wishing rock") that can do pretty much anything his characters want them to do. They represent the central problem in Rodriguez's work: he seems to think that since digital filmmaking can allow him to do anything, he should, without ever thinking it through.



Blu-Ray Rating: **2.0/5.0**

Thus, the public is treated to a shapeless, rambling bore like "Shorts," which feels like it was slapped together in Rodriguez's garage. Its story is told out of order in a series of self-contained vignettes, but this is hardly "Pulp Fiction" for kids. The film seems determined to reach young viewers with the most crippling form of ADD, as it zips past all the "boring parts" of the action in order to get to the "cool stuff." At 89 minutes, this approach quickly grows tiresome, since none of the moment-to-moment action is of any real consequence to the characters, or the audience.



Shorts was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on November 24th, 2009.

Photo credit: Warner Brothers Home Video

"Shorts" opens with its best (and only relatable) sequence, which observes its young hero Toe (Jimmy Bennett) undergoing the formidable task of flossing between his braces. Rodriguez's best films, such as the first "Spy Kids" and "Planet Terror," are the ones with enough human moments to make the audience give a darn about his characters. Yet this film's pint-sized protagonists quickly prove to be constructed out of cardboard (they make Alfalfa and Spanky look like Oliver and the Dodger). Toe and his friends find their lives turned upside down when they discover a "wishing rock" that grants their innermost desires...more or less. When a kid wishes for "friends," he gets a few clunky

spaceships filled with tiny, raisin-headed aliens. When another kid wishes for "escape," a pterodactyl whisks him into the sky. When another wishes for "telephonesis," a phone receiver sprouts out of his head. This rock sure has a sense of humor.



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Photo credit: Warner Brothers Home Video

The CG gag-laden clothesline shoddily disguised as a plot enables Rodriguez to indulge his tendency of latching onto an idea before it's been fully developed. One can almost imagine him thinking, "A machine-gun leg? A booger monster? That'll get butts in the seats!" The filmmaking lacks subtlety while the performances lack urgency. Most of the kids barely try to register an emotion (even the bully, played by newcomer Jolie Vanier, is too sleepy-eyed to generate much menace). The production is so amateurish that it's a shock when high-profile actors show up, such as Leslie Mann, who gets fused together with husband Jon Cryer, in what is admittedly the film's best effect. It's also sort of morbidly fascinating to see the great William H. Macy recite dialogue like, "Now your booger's trying to eat you!"

There's even a moment when the kids wish that they were in a Hollywood movie (someone should've left that wish un-granted). But then, luckily, my wish was granted: the movie ended.

"Shorts" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, Spanish and French audio tracks, and comes with an additional disc doubling as a standard definition DVD and a digital copy of the film. The BD-Live-enabled Blu-ray includes four short featurettes that may be of interest to young aspiring filmmakers. In "Ten Minute Film School: Short Shorts," Rodriguez shows excerpts from the home movies that inspired "Shorts," and they are neither better nor worse than the completed film. This underlines the fact that "Shorts" is little more than a glorified home movie that should've stayed inside the Rodriguez household.

*'Shorts' is released by Warner Home Video and stars Jimmy Bennett, Jake Short, Kat Dennings, Trevor Gagnon, Jolie Vanier, Leslie Mann, Jon Cryer, William H. Macy and James Spader. It was written by Robert Rodriguez & Alvaro Rodriguez and directed by Robert Rodriguez. It was released on November 24th, 2009. It is rated PG.*

By MATT FAGERHOLM  
Staff Writer  
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com)

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