

Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Seth Rogen in Moving '50/50'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 30, 2011 - 10:07am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Jonathan Levine's "50/50" is a daring blend of buddy comedy, light romance, family drama, and, oh yeah, cancer movie. The tightrope act of a script by Will Reiser is elevated in remarkable ways by one of the best ensembles of the year, led ably by the great Joseph Gordon-Levitt, doing career-best, Oscar nomination-worthy work. With amazing support by Anna Kendrick, Seth Rogen, and Anjelica Huston's most memorable turn in years, "50/50" is as emotionally resonant and memorable as anything released in months. You won't soon forget it.

Based on the real friendship and real disease of Reiser and buddy Rogen, "50/50" essentially tries to offer a unique take on the common cinematic structure of a protagonist trying to overcome a deadly disease. Whereas most films that feature a cancer diagnosis follow a traditional, manipulative arc, one of the greatest accomplishments of "50/50" is its general lack of predictability. People don't turn into Hollywood clichés after having that one doctor's visit that will change their lives forever. They go on. They still have girlfriends, still have friends, and still have needs.



50/50

Photo credit: Summit

Adam (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is a pretty average guy. He has a longtime friend named Kyle (Seth Rogen) and an artsy girlfriend named Rachael (Bryce Dallas Howard). He also has unusual back pain. What is not average about Adam is that, unlike a lot of men in their mid-20s,

he has a tumor along his spine. He's given a 50/50 shot at surviving and begins chemotherapy (with fantastic supporting work from Philip Baker Hall and Matt Frewer in small-but-memorable roles as former patients). He also begins therapy with a young doctor named Katherine (Anna Kendrick) and uncomfortably tells his mother (Anjelica Huston) about the potentially-fatal coin flip he's going through with his life.

"50/50" is a hard film to review. It's one that unfolds in relatively light, seemingly inconsequential ways. There's a predictable arc with the cold Rachael and a matching one with the sweet Katherine. There are friends-being-friends scenes between Adam & Kyle and a few moments with his mom. Through all of this, Levitt is doing something absolutely amazing in its subtlety – he's grounding the entire film through his believable performance. He does nothing showy, nothing manipulative, nothing over-the-top. So when the film does approach its emotional climax, it will hit you like a ton of bricks. I'm not ashamed to admit to more than a few tears. It's a moving film because we get to know Adam – he's a guy with a friend, girl trouble, and a protective mom. He could be me. He could be you.



50/50

Photo credit: Summit

Or he could have been a movie cliché as so many of these characters are in so many of these movies. "50/50" is almost more remarkable for what's it not than what it is. It's not heartstring-pulling. It's not wacky buddy comedy. It's not clichéd romance. It works by virtue of feeling real. Rogen is playing a bit broad (but doing so by basically being himself) but he's a good counterbalance to Levitt's more subdued work. And I can't say enough about Huston in her few scenes. She reminds us why she's essentially a living legend, doing her best work in a quarter-century.

Ultimately, "50/50" is a simple film. It's about an average guy in a very unique situation. One that changes his life forever. By staying true to the power of this extraordinary story, the team behind "50/50" have made one of the more essential films of 2011. Don't miss it.

"50/50" stars Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Seth Rogen, Anna Kendrick, Anjelica Huston, Bryce Dallas Howard, Philip Baker Hall, and Matt Frewer. It was written by Will Reiser and directed by Jonathan Levin. It opens on September 30th, 2011 and is rated R.



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