

Jonah Hill Gets Lost in Mediocre ‘The Sitter’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 9, 2011 - 2:07pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – David Gordon Green’s “Your Highness” was like a punch to the gut – an unqualified train wreck from someone who had been correctly dubbed one of the best working filmmakers. His same-year follow-up, “The Sitter,” opening this weekend, is far less disastrous but similarly disappointing in that it displays flaws that the talented director never showed even hints of previous to 2011. Jonah Hill brings the piece enough of his stellar comic timing to make the comedy a decent one to catch on cable on a rainy day, but can’t save a film that needed a few more rewrites and at least one more trip to the editing bay.

Feeling at least somewhat inspired by “Adventures in Babysitting,” this is a 2011 take on a crazy night in the city with an irresponsible guardian and three difficult children. The guardian this time is the gregarious Noah Griffith (Jonah Hill), a nice kid with a lack of focus, a rich father who abandoned him, and a gorgeous girlfriend named Marisa (Ari Graynor), who’s clearly using him as a placeholder and errand boy while she tries to find someone cooler. Noah catches that his mother (Jessica Hecht) is really hoping to meet someone tonight on a blind date set up by her friend Mrs. Pedulla (Erin Daniels) and so he agrees to babysit the Pedulla kids – anxiety-prone Slater (Max Records), Ke\$ha-loving Blithe (Landry Bender), and destructive Rodrigo (Kevin Hernandez).



The Sitter

Photo credit: Fox

Before you can say “that’s a bad idea,” Noah has agreed to drive into New York City, pick up some cocaine for Marisa, and meet her at a party...with the rugrats in the Pedulla’s minivan. Oh the things a horny boy will do for sex. Of course, things go wrong almost immediately when Rodrigo disappears, drops a cherry bomb in a swanky restaurant, and gets Noah’s picture on the most quickly-drawn-up wanted poster in NYC history. Things get real serious when the gang arrives at the coke dealers that Marisa knows – a caricature named Karl (Sam Rockwell) and his sidekick Julio (J.B. Smoove) – and Rodrigo heists an egg filled with 10k in product. Now Noah has to get the money to Karl by midnight, keep the kids safe, and get the minivan home.

Green brought an old-fashioned energy and rhythm to his brilliant “Pineapple Express” that simply isn’t here. Brian Gatewood & Alessandro Tanaka’s debut script (and it doesn’t take an IMDB check to know that this is the work of freshman writers) lurches instead of flows. Every time the movie works – and there definitely are a few laughs – you can be sure it’s going to be followed by a scene that does not click. The movie never finds the comic pace needed for a “night on the town” flick like this one, constantly pulling one out of the enjoyment of the madcap adventures with a joke that needed a rewrite or a scene that needed another edit. It almost feels rushed in the process, as if Hill had one foot out the door to his next project and Green was busy editing “Your Highness.”



The Sitter

Photo credit: Fox

To be fair, there are elements that save “The Sitter” from complete disaster. Hill is an engaging lead – he always has been and I can’t wait to see how he develops in the next phase of his career – and the kids are relatively entertaining, especially Bender as a girl who’s trying to grow up too quickly. Records, who you may recognize from “Where the Wild Things Are,” whines a bit too much but I blame that on bad direction more than his performance, and the filmmakers should be credited with not overly underlining the revelation of his predictable secret source of his anxiety with manipulative emotion. And, of course, it goes without saying that Sam Rockwell makes anything he’s in just a bit better. And the movie occasionally has a surreal streak — such as the fact that Karl’s gang is a group of bodybuilders or the fact that Slater’s being crushed on by redhead twins — that threaten to give the piece the personality of which it needed more.

It sounds like faint praise for sure but “The Sitter” could have been much worse. With a less talented cast, it would have fallen as flat as a family comedy with The Rock. Hill, Rockwell, the kids – they save the piece from complete disaster. Of course, if David Gordon Green had found a little bit more of that talent he seemed to misplace this year, it could have been much better too. This is two strikes. I don’t know if I can handle a third.

“The Sitter” stars Jonah Hill, Ari Graynor, Sam Rockwell, J.B. Smoove, Max Records, Landry Bender, and Kevin Hernandez. It was written by Brian Gatewood & Alessandro Tanaka and directed by David Gordon Green. It is rated R and opens on December 9th, 2011.



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