

Drinking ‘The Hangover’ Formula, ‘21 and Over’ is a Poor Man’s ‘Animal House’

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – When Jon Lucas and Scott Moore (the writers of “The Hangover” and its sequel) decided to go back in time to college with the same drunk movie formula, their resulting “21 and Over” neglected two major ingredients: being consistently funny and making bold new choices.

Since you’re willingly entering a movie like this to shut down your brain and feast your eyes on human stupidity, that’ll pay off for you in the first 30 minutes. With the remaining short 63 minutes, though, you’ll see that “21 and Over” already blew its load and front-loaded most of its funnies.



In the car: Skylar Astin (left), Myles Teller (middle), Sarah Wright and Justin Chon (front) star in “21 and Over”.

Image credit: John Johnson, Twenty One and Over Productions

After the first third of the film, the rest drags, some of the punch lines flop and dramatic moments that attempt to diversify the film’s humor aren’t emotional. “21 and Over” would have been better served going for pure comedy the whole time – like “Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy” successfully pulled off – and a script rewrite that took chances beyond “The Hangover” formula we’ve already seen twice now.

As for the less-memorable characters in “21 and Over” as compared to “The Hangover,” we have the fast-talking Miller (Miles Teller, “Project X”). Miller gangs up with Casey (Skylar Astin, “Pitch Perfect”) to celebrate Jeff Chang’s (Justin Chon, the “Twilight” series) 21st birthday in true “The Hangover” style – and the night before a major med school exam, of course.



Left to right: Miles Teller, Skylar Astin and Justin Chon in “21 and Over”.

Image credit: John Johnson, Twenty One and Over Productions

All the while, Casey tries to shag the smiley sorority chick Nicole (Sarah Wright, “The House Bunny”). Casey feels too desperate for her and Nicole feels like she’s just waiting around to be gotten by him. The match is overly scripted, can’t be believed in the real world and doesn’t give the common guy any real hope that he could bag a catch like her.

While Jeff Chang’s disapproving father lurks in the weeds to assure he makes it through the night’s fermented activities, it might strike you as odd that this 21-year-old guy’s body can be an unconsciously limp fish for so long and through so many made-by-Hollywood twists and turns. (Jeff Chang’s father, Dr. Chang, plays homage to Dr. Pierre Chang on TV’s “Lost,” which is also played by François Chau. And Jeff Chang is 10 years older in real life than his character.)



Left to right: Skylar Astin, Sarah Wright and Myles Teller in “21 and Over”.

Image credit: John Johnson, Twenty One and Over Productions

As Jeff Chang prances around campus drunk while sporting a woman’s pink bra with a teddy bear covering his junk, it makes no sense that his co-drinking friends are always so seemingly sober. They’re even somewhat responsible in their attempts to advance the film’s singular and simple plot: just to get Jeff Chang drunk and then to return him home.

You can feel that writers and directors Jon Lucas and Scott Moore certainly watched 1978’s “National Lampoon’s Animal House”. Trying to make a modern-day version of the No. 1 college film of all time and the ultimate party movie is a bold, worthwhile feat to tackle. Failing to be bold, though, is how it failed.



Justin Chon (center) stars in “21 and Over”.

Image credit: John Johnson, Twenty One and Over Productions

“21 and Over” – AKA the “B”-quality “The College Hangover” – desperately needed a John Belushi or Zach Galifianakis rambunctious loose

cannon, but didn't find it in Miles Teller or Justin Chon. "21 and Over" settled for wannabe children in training when they needed masterful party men who truly know how to green their liver.

The film does enjoy moments of redemption in the fast-mouthed speed of Miles Teller's dialog. Even when he's not reading from a skillful script, his ability to speak like Jesse Eisenberg in David Fincher's "The Social Network" can capture and hold the attention of your turned-off brain.

For its second gem, the film recognized that every movie like this needs a healthy sampling of comedic racism. "21 and Over" found it, exploited it and earned some chortles from it.



Left to right: Myles Teller, Skylar Astin, Sarah Wright and Justin Chon in "21 and Over".

Image credit: John Johnson, Twenty One and Over Productions

All in all, though, we don't fall in love with any of these characters, we don't root for the film's one "couple" (who we think all along will unrealistically be granted a predictable Hollywood ending), we can't remember the jokes after the fact and, most important, we aren't consistently entertained.

While even a few random boobies don't save this train wreck, the most grievous offender of all is that we feel manipulated into giving "The Hangover" masterminds our 10 bucks again while getting an immature regression back to what appears like a college film made by college film students.

"21 and Over" stars Miles Teller, Justin Chon, Jonathan Keltz, Skylar Astin, Sarah Wright, Jonathan Keltz, François Chau, Russell Hodgkinson, Daniel Booko, Russell Mercado, Josie Loren, Christiann Castellanos and Dustin Ybarra from writers and director Jon Lucas and Scott Moore. The film, which opened on March 1, 2013, is rated "R" for crude and sexual content, pervasive language, some graphic nudity, drugs and drinking. It has a running time of 93 minutes.



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