

Adam Sandler Exploits the Family, More in ‘Blended’

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Rating: **1.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Trying to understand the psychology and philosophy of manchild Adam Sandler, when it comes to his “middle-age” movies, will perplex film scholars and therapists for generations to come. His latest excuse for a “family comedy” is the insipid and exploitative “Blended.”

There is a strange dichotomy in these Sandler comedies – see also “Grown-Ups,” “Jack and Jill” and “That’s My Boy” – that desires to be warm explorations of family, but at the same time wants to showcase the sixth grade level baby humor that is Sandler’s bread and butter. And make no mistake, despite “screenwriters” and “directors,” the mark on these films is all Sandler, who most likely goes over each line with his staff of sycophants, giggling at every change he makes. If your idea of hilarity is Sandler riding an ostrich, or Shaquille “Shaq” O’Neal doing a sex dance, then go to movie alone and don’t subject any others to your folly.

Jim (Adam Sandler) is a widower going on a first blind date with Lauren (Drew Barrymore). The father of three daughters (the oldest portrayed by teen star Bella Thorne) chooses Hooters for that date, which doesn’t go over very well. Lauren is divorced, with two boys, and an ex-husband (Joel McHale) who is not a nice man. Lauren complains about all this to her best friend Jen (Wendi McLendon-Covey), who comes up with a solution.



Lauren (Drew Barrymore) and Jim (Adam Sandler) Have Their First Hooters Date in ‘Blended’

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Jen is dating a wealthy man who owns Dick Sporting Goods, and is scared that he is going to propose to her on a South African trip. So she cancels, and gives the room to Lauren and her family. Unbeknownst to that brood, Jim and his three girls have also booked the trip – Jim works in retail for the owner of Dick's – and they're also taking the rooms. The families are forced together, "blended" If you will.

The story gymnastics to get everybody together, facilitated by one of Sandler's obvious product placements (Dick's Sporting Goods), is only one of the very annoying elements of this film. The South African resort that they stay in – another product plug – is as far away from the real Africa as any white man can imagine. Think a Disneyland version of the continent. "Complimenting" that ridiculous place is musical host Nickens (Terry Crews), who leads African singers around as a weird "Greek Chorus," actually following the families around singing songs about their predicaments. Terry Crews is from Flint, Michigan, and flirts with a racial stereotype in his portrayal of the African native singer.

Drew Barrymore is buried underneath all this Sandler-ization. She is content to be exploited as well by the antics, and suffers through the slimy Joel McHale – does Joel tell his agent to only give him sleazeball roles? – and a Sandler persona who is completely wrong for her character, but ends up right because he finds some monkeys, or some such African stuff. Who cares about Africa, as long as it gets the First World white couple together forever.

Besides the the Hooters girls, Sandler gives old "Saturday Night Live" pal Kevin Nealon a role as an older man who marries a large breasted woman – Sandler sure loves his boobies. It's such a little boy attitude toward women's bodies, it's amazing that Sandler has procreated. To make his character the father of three daughters, and excuse his Hooters obsession because his now dead wife used to be a "manager" of Hooters. Well, why didn't he just marry a Hooter's girl and fulfill his preferred destiny?



'African' Singer Nickens (Terry Crews) in 'Blended'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Ah, I could complain forever about it, but's it's not going to change as long as the Adam Sandler box office dollars flow. This is just a warning that "Blended" is a waste of good movie money, and doesn't come up with anything new in the Sandler oeuvre. He wants his family warmth, but also wants to look down its dress – it borders on creepy. And it's not all unfunny, but there are so many lame duds that it's difficult to produce a real laugh when a joke works.

But Adam Sandler marches on, lazily producing one of these films every year and knowing the dollar flow will never end. As more choices open every weekend, he might be surprised one year – hopefully with this film – that the gravy train stops and the laziness is exposed. My mouth to the ear of the cinema universe.

"Blended" opens everywhere on May 23rd. Featuring Adam Sandler, Drew Barrymore, Kevin Nealon, Bella Thorne, Wendi McLendon-Covey, Shaquille O'Neill, Terry Crews and Joel McHale. Written by Clare Sera and Ivan Menchell. Directed by Frank Coraci. Rated "PG-13"



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