

‘Laggies’ Lags Behind With Connect-the-Dots Story

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 7, 2014 - 12:27pm

- [A24](#) [2]
- [Andrea Seigel](#) [3]
- [Chloe Grace Moretz](#) [4]
- [Elle Kemper](#) [5]
- [Gretchen Moi](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Jeff Garlin](#) [8]
- [Keira Knightley](#) [9]
- [Laggies](#) [10]
- [Life Crisis](#) [11]
- [Lynn Shelton](#) [12]
- [Mark Webber](#) [13]
- [Movie Review](#) [14]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [15]
- [Sam Rockwell](#) [16]



Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Apparently “Laggies” is a term which does mean one is “lagging behind” in the growing-up-to-be-an-adult requirement. The term is the title of a new comedy, which places the main character in a high concept situation, which only resides in the parallel universe of movieland.

Keira Knightley, the highly appealing British film actress, tries on her American accent in this one, as the character who practices the lagging behind of her very young adulthood (that accent is fairly exaggerated, as if she winked a bit at America). She is terrific to experience in a movie, and she has considerable charm in this one. But she’s also asked to do some things that are highly improbable for a adult woman to do – of any age – and that situational unlikelihood derails the story. This film is a prime example of decent performers unable to rise above the words and actions on the paper. It’s not terrible, but it’s not that good either.

Knightley is Megan, a 28 year old who has just graduated from a Masters program in counseling, but can’t settle into a job. Her high school friends are getting married, pregnant and opening businesses, and even she has a live-in boyfriend named Anthony (Mark Webber). She cannot seem to focus on the road ahead, and Anthony is thinking marriage.



Megan (Keira Knightley) Tries to Get it Together in ‘Laggies’

Photo credit: A24

At the wedding of her friend Allison (Elle Kemper) she gets too nervous about the proposal, and runs away. At a grocery store, she buys liquor for a teenager named Annika (Chloë Grace Moretz), and hangs out with her gang. The next day, she tells Anthony she will marry him, but first she needs to go on a self-help retreat. She runs into Annika again, and asks if she can stay at her house. Annika's father Craig (Sam Rockwell) is surprised, but agrees.

Most of that description would have many people calling the authorities, but Andrea Seigel's screenplay connects the dots between each happening and allows it to occur. It's a sky-high concept, presupposing that there all the supporting characters are either clueless or blithely supporting. It's just so unlikely a circumstance to happen that the chances of it are nil, and that becomes more glaring than the story itself. It wants to be a coming-to-age narrative, but it applies itself in the wrong directions.

Which is a shame because the cast is game and have been great in other scenarios. Sam Rockwell, who is kind of nutty, wrings his Dad character like a wet tee-shirt that needs to be quickly dried. He comes off pretty well, save for awkward May-December seducing – yep, he and Megan end up canoodling. There is no reason for the coupling, except to advance Megan's "quarter life" crisis, and doesn't seem real in context.

It's one of those years in which Chloë Grace Moretz gets a bunch of her films released, and she blows with the winds of whatever the story brings her. Here she is a confident 16 year old as Annika, but her reaction time and connection to Megan is strained. She has a buddy in the film portrayed by Kaitlyn Dever who seemed to understand the element of being a teenager more boldly than Moretz. In observing Ms. Moretz during her career, there is a feeling that she never got to experience the normalcy of childhood development, but ironically plays those stages-of-life characters on screen.



Driven to Distraction: Annika (Chloë Grace Moretz) and Megan in 'Laggies'

Photo credit: A24

The centerpiece romance, that of Megan and Anthony, takes the most pounding in Ms. Seigel's screenplay, and the on-again-off-again nature of it is maddening. The joke of adulthood is that at a certain point everyone is expected to develop social skills that can endure in long-term relationships. The one thing the movie does do successfully is show how impossible that is for some people.

So the idea was in the right place in this film, directed by Lynn Shelton, who got good notices in 2011 for "Your Sister's Sister." But having an adult woman flee to the security of a barely known teenager and her single Dad just doesn't work, unless it's darker or more random, and not in a transition comedy.

"Laggies" continues its limited release in Chicago on November 7th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Keira Knightley, Sam Rockwell, Chloë Grace Moretz, Mark Webber, Elle Kemper, Gretchen Moi and Jeff Garlin. Written by Andrea Seigel. Directed by Lynn Shelton. Rated "R"



[17]

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Source URL (retrieved on *Apr 24 2024 - 5:34am*):

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