

Bottom Line is ‘Blockers’ Has Some Decent Laughs

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Comedy is purely subjective, and the new film ‘Blockers’ sets out to prove it, by expectorating joke after joke in all categories of sophistication. Physical pratfalls, witty asides, gross-out, sex, nudity, drugs, surrealism and more are all on the humor buffet, so pick, choose and laugh, as they pile it on.

Produced by the comedy mavens Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, among others, the story is basically framed within their style of keeping the humor flowing fast and furious. Some joke doesn’t land? They’ll be another one in a about a minute. It’s interesting in a pace like this frenzy that the film still seems overlong, but that really just has to do with the plot... parents wanting to deny their teenage daughters the opportunity to lose their virginity on prom night. It’s easy to guess the outcomes, which pretty much come to form within a bunch of clichés, but along the way there are some original obstacles put up – both by the parents and the kids – and also some side stories that are so outside the main premise that it’s through-the-looking-glass surreal. Comedy is also a bag of tricks.

It’s senior year for three best friends, Julie (Kathryn Newton), Kayla (Geraldine Viswanathan) and Sam (Gideon Adlon), and they anticipate their era-ending prom. For some reason, they make a “sex pact” to lose their virginities on that prom night. Only Julie has a steady boyfriend, and that is what gets her single Mom Lisa (Leslie Mann) suspicious about the upcoming dance.



Ike Barinholtz, Leslie Mann and John Cena in 'Final Portrait'

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Lisa recruits two other parents, Kayla's Dad Mitchell (John Cena) and Sam's estranged Dad Hunter (Ike Barinholtz) into the information about the pact... which they find out about through a series of text message gymnastics. It's up to these three stooge parents to "block" their daughters from doing the deed, even if it means infiltrating the prom and its after parties. Hilarity is about to ensue.

And it does, generally. The thing that Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg know how to oversee is the exaggeration comedy, and that is what first time director Kay Cannon gives them. Throw in some drinking/drugs, and you can go to the extreme with any subject, including epic vomiting. So yes, there are some weird and multiple laughs in this bizarre creature of a film, but there is also the feeling that we've been here before in better movies. But a laugh is a laugh is a laugh, and there are too few of them available in our strange days.

The comic actor Leslie Mann ("This is 40") is usually perfect for this style of comedy, but she is actually the least of the parent trio. John Cena, a musclemen actor who is following the Schwarzenegger playbook of breaking outside his heroic body, actually was willing to do anything for a laugh, including a challenging scenario with a beer bong. Ike Barinholtz, a Chicago native who is an up and coming comic actor, also had a good sense of his goofy character, and was solid throughout.



Losing It: The Cast of ‘Blockers’
Photo credit: Universal Pictures

The film needed, however, to get out of the rut of its plot and the odd way the high schoolers acted at times... they change direction so much that you couldn’t pin down anything, so it was definitely a case of older people writing their dialogue. In one truly surreal bit, the parents watch other parents (portrayed by Gary Cole and Gina Gershon, I kid you not) having role-playing sex, and somehow have to raid their home in the middle of it. Thus it is possible that we have seen the first “male private part” body double, for there is Gary Cole’s unit on display, without a distinct view of his entire self. Ponder that at your next film club gathering.

But it is laughs we’re after, and as mentioned “Blockers” provides them. It’s pure escapism with no basis in reality, for if real high schoolers have ever made a sex pact, it is either adults thinking it happened or youthful tall tales – all the “blocking” in the world can’t change those two outcomes. Add that to your film club discussion, after the Gary Cole Schlong-Body-Double Conundrum.

“Blockers” opens everywhere on April 6th. Featuring Leslie Mann, John Cena, Ike Barinholtz, Kathryn Newton, Geraldine Viswanthan, Gideon Aldon and Gary Cole (and his body part). Written by Jim and Brian Kehoe. Directed by Kay Cannon. Rated “R”



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [21]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [20]

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