

## Seth Rogen Delivers in Controversial, Hilarious ‘Observe and Report’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 10, 2009 - 12:09pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The hysterically misleading TV spots for [Jody Hill](#) [12]’s “[Observe and Report](#) [13]” make it out to look like another broad comedy that might even have a cute romance between stars [Seth Rogen](#) [14] and [Anna Faris](#) [15]. There’s nothing cute or predictable about “Observe and Report”. And that’s precisely why it works.

Those ads are like suckering family viewers into a [Kevin Smith](#) [16] movie by advertising that he did a voice in the animated “[Doogal](#) [17]” or pitching “[Tropic Thunder](#) [18]” to the crowds that really liked that family-friendly [Ben Stiller](#) [19] in “[Night at the Museum](#) [20]”. Audiences have no idea what they’re in for.



Anna Faris as Brandi and Seth Rogen as Ronnie.

*Photo credit: Peter Sorel and Warner Brothers*

Drug use, extensive frontal nudity, extreme violence, date rape - this is material that’s not for the faint of heart. If you were remotely offended by last year’s Rogen vehicle (“[Pineapple Express](#) [21]”) find another movie for this weekend’s date night. “O&R” pushes the envelope to a level that will be well beyond the breaking point for a lot of viewers and I understand that. It’s not a movie for everyone.

However, if you’re like me and you think that comedy should be dangerous every once in a while just for the health of the genre, then get in line. Sometimes, humor should make you uncomfortable. I would never dare to suggest that everyone will fall for the very dark jokes of “Observe and Report,” but aren’t you exhausted by the predictability of modern movie comedy? Don’t you sometimes want to see something

completely different? Aren't you tired of movies that you could write yourself simply based on watching the TV spots?

In a script that was reportedly inspired by "Taxi Driver," Seth Rogen gives the best performance of his career to date as Ronnie Barnhardt, a bipolar mall security guard with serious mental issues. He lives alone with his alcoholic mother (Celia Weston), dreams of dating Brandi the makeup-counter girl (Anna Faris), and wishes he could carry a gun to work instead of a nightstick.

Ronnie feels like he may have finally found his purpose in life when a flasher decides to target the mall parking lot and Brandi becomes one of his early victims. Despite the invasion of actual authority in the form of Detective Harrison (Ray Liotta), Ronnie will be the hero he's always been in his own mind, rescuing the girl and saving the mall from perversion.



Seth Rogen as Ronnie and Collette Wolf as Nell.

Photo credit: Peter Sorel and Warner Brothers

Assisting Ronnie are his right-hand man Dennis (Michael Pena) and twin guards John and Matt (John and Matt Yuan). He gets emotional support from the sweet-and-cute coffee girl Nell (Collette Wolfe).

This all sounds like the set-up for a Will Farrell comedy but "Observe and Report" is much more subversive than it's set-up. Around halfway through, a movie that's been dark all along takes a violent turn after Harrison drops Ronnie off on the wrong side of town. From there, Ronnie, who has decided to try and be a cop, begins a descent into madness.

And this is not your typical movie madness. Hill and Rogen expertly walk a tight-rope of comedy and tension. Ronnie is not a likable character. He's a hero only in his own mind. You're not supposed to root for him to get the girl and stop the bad guy. In fact, Ronnie clearly needs help. After the first two acts of "Observe," there wouldn't be a surprised face in the theater if the final one ended in a hail of bullets (and I'm not saying it doesn't.)

The comedy of "Observe and Report" is meant to make you uneasy, to put you on edge. It reminded me of Scorsese's "After Hours" or Demme's "Something Wild" in its blend of tension and comedy. "O&R" is a film of conflicting tones, sometimes right in the same moment. In one scene, a police officer says "I thought this would be funny, but it's just sad." He could be talking about the unpredictability of the entire film, a comedy that's going to put off and offend thousands of people this weekend and build a cult following at the same time.

If you're tired of the same old comedy routine, if you are exhausted by the predictability of the genre, and if you believe that sometimes comedy should push people's buttons, then "Observe and Report" will not only be one of your favorite comedies of the season but probably the year.

Ultimately, for this critic, "Observe and Report" takes daring, bold chances in a genre that too often plays it safe. Even if you don't think those chances pay off, you have to respect the attempt.

*'Observe and Report' stars Seth Rogen, Anna Faris, Michael Pena, Ray Liotta, Collette Wolfe, and Celia Weston. It was written and directed by Jody Hill. It opens on April 10th, 2009. It is rated R.*

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