

'Neighbors 2': Lackluster, but good for a few laughs

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 92 minutes

Comedy is hard enough without having to recreate your past successes. As follow-ups go, *Neighbors 2: Sorority Rising* features a couple of chuckles and could have been much worse overall. However, this is hardly praise. The sequel suffers from overly familiar situations and like many of its ilk, the successful gag ratio has dropped exponentially. You'll laugh occasionally, but will have a difficult time remembering any of it in the morning.

Now awaiting the arrival of their second child, Mac (Seth Rogen) and Kelly (Rose Byrne) have finally decided to move to the suburbs — all they have to do is calmly wait through a 30-day escrow period for the sale of their house to clear. However, a new group of renters arrive next door with the help of ex-nemesis Terry (Zac Efron). It's a newly formed sorority led by Shelby (Chloe Grace Moretz), a woman who wants the freedom to live as she pleases (which essentially means partying and smoking marijuana). Ignoring Mac and Kelly's pleas for quiet, the two groups begin scheming to undermine each other.

On the positive side, the movie possesses some welcome messages. There are a couple of pointed comments about fraternity culture and a scene or two that briefly addresses the double standards that female students are faced with. Dimwitted Terry also has to deal with his own insecurities about growing up and moving on. It's an interesting idea, although this element isn't particularly funny. His changing relationship with Mac takes on a similar tangent to the first flick and doesn't offer much that is new.

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Mac and Kelly have a few good lines, including the complete confusion they have about how escrow actually works. Still, the movie’s standout gag comes from an unexpected source — Mac’s brother Jimmy (Ike Barinholtz). When the group infiltrate a tailgating event, Jimmy’s creepy clown get-up and mannerisms result in the biggest laughs. It’s the funniest thing in the movie by far, so much so that the filmmakers choose to give it a callback later on.

But that’s the best that can be said about the film. For the story to work, you have to overlook several issues. It appears as though the married leads have learned absolutely nothing from the first film — they pretty much mimic the exact same behavior. Admittedly, they acknowledge this problem late in the movie, but that’s hardly sufficient justification. Even though it’s an over-the-top and outrageous tale, factors like these ultimately strain believability.

And many of the jokes are retreads from the first film that don’t seem as funny this time around; the movie reeks of desperation by the time it sets up a new series of “air bag” gags. Frankly, a lot of it falls flat, particularly by the finale, which wraps things up in a convenient and unexciting manner. It doesn’t help that the film appears choppy edited together. The strangest example comes after the climax with an extended series of wrap-up scenes. By the close of this lengthy denouement, one almost expects another twist or big final gag. Instead, the movie abruptly cuts to black.

Neighbors 2: Sorority Rising has a game cast and does feature a couple of funny moments, but it all feels rather rushed and hastily put together. There is only one standout joke, and otherwise doesn’t present enough new material to recommend. This chapter is only worth a rental.

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For the Sun***