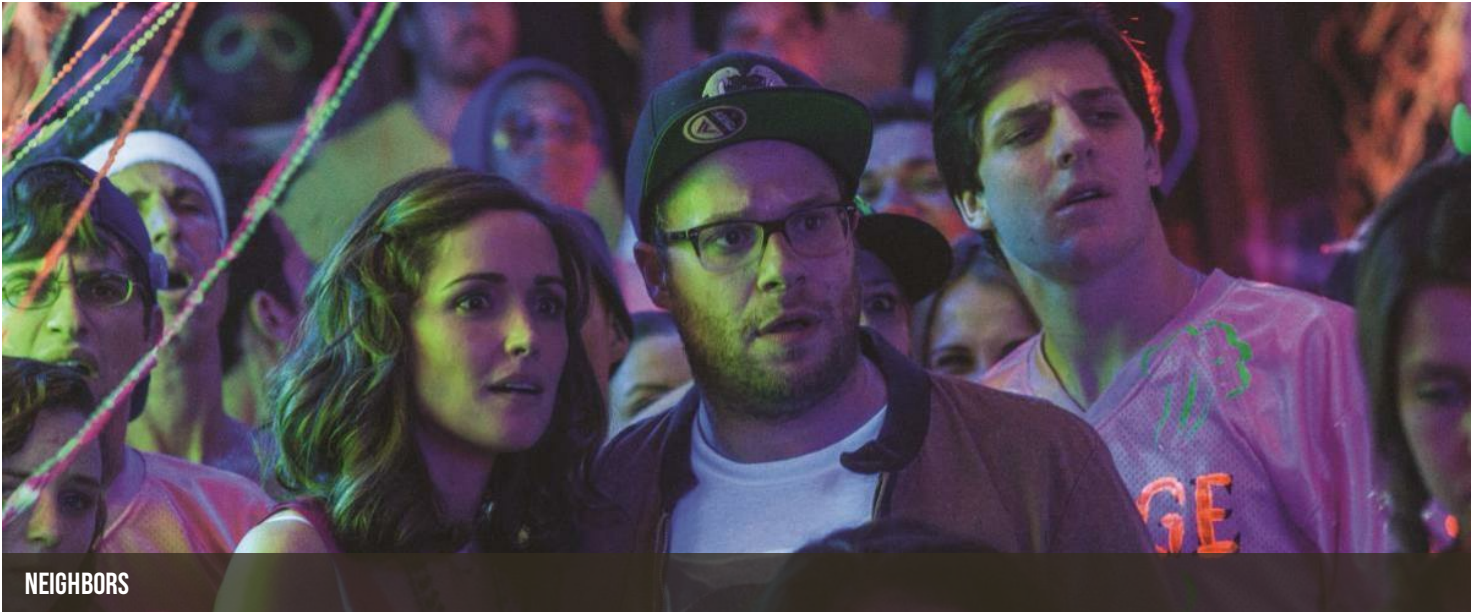# 👍 RogerEbert.com

Choose a Section ▼

🔍

REVIEWS

NEIGHBORS

★ ★ ⬖ | **Susan Wloszczyna**

May 9, 2014 | ✎ 10

Here is the thing about "Neighbors," a hard-R hybrid of "Animal House" and a sort-of sequel to "Knocked Up" in which a Gen X couple with an infant daughter and a hefty mortgage declares war on the rowdy Gen Y frat boys who move in next door: You will laugh. Maybe not nearly as much as during "The 40-Year-Old Virgin" or "Superbad" but there is a steady stream of inducements to at least chuckle with regularity. Most of these lewd dollops of humor rely on what we will refer to (as a matter of decorum) as "Richard" jokes, ranging from artisanal dildos to the miracle of an instant erection.

You may even applaud, as my audience did, when Rose Byrne—as mother and wife Kelly, who desperately needs a night out and is shockingly adept at cursing—proves her comedic prowess in "Bridesmaids" was no fluke. With almost scary zeal, she summons her fulsome wiles to seduce both a girl and a guy into hooking up after lubricating their libidos with several rounds of shots.

You will also groan at some of the more inappropriate moments, such as the unfortunate use of the "N" word as well as an ill-advised joke about baby HIV. Also annoying is the lack of any fully developed women beyond Byrne and Lisa Kudrow as a fed-up college dean. The female students fluttering by all seem to dress as if they were in a Victoria's Secret fashion show. And note to the two male screenwriters, Andrew J. Cohen and Brendan O'Brien: Breast-feeding is not as amusing as you think it is.

As for the plot, it's a grass-is-always-greener scenario—but with plenty of weed, too. The twist is, both sides want what the other one has. For cubicle drone Mac (Seth Rogen), it's a chance to revisit his responsibility-free past. For party major Teddy (Zac Efron), it's a possible future beyond hot-tub bacchanals and hazing underclassmen. They are less foils and more fun-house reflections of one another, and that is rather deep for this kind of id-driven tomfoolery.

Much like Nicholas Stoller's previous directorial efforts, "Forgetting Sarah Marshall" and "Get Him to the Greek," "Neighbors" is messily pasted together with improvised bits and plot threads that dangle. I miss the days when comedy scripts were lovingly honed, with dialogue that sang not stuttered. But at least Stoller manages to avoid many of the clichés of the raunchy bromance genre. Still, it makes no sense that no one else on the block complains that the Greeks blare music and set off fireworks at all hours.

But what is most surprising about this latest effort from graduates of the Judd Apatow Clown Academy for Emotionally Stunted Males is that Efron gives his most mature and nuanced post-"High School Musical" performance yet as the alpha stud of Delta Psi. Not that his character is one note. Instead, like a latter-day Eddie Haskell but with killer abs, he easily slips from sincere and reassuring to sneaky and underhanded when counter-attacks are called for. You actually feel his regret when it finally dawns on him that maybe he should have gone to class once in a while.

Meanwhile, Rogen—a producer along with his usual cohort, Evan Goldberg—has devolved back into his standard pothead schlub routine after taking a stretch with more dramatic work in "Take This Waltz" and "50/50" as well as playing straight man to Barbra Streisand in "The Guilt Trip." The problem is "Neighbors" will likely gross more at the box office than all those three films combined. Who would have predicted that Jonah Hill—the Boo-Boo to Rogen's Yogi Bear—would be the one to end up with two Oscar nominations?

A sub-strata of fresh faces provides able support, including [Dave Franco](#) (younger brother of James) as Pete, Teddy's sharper second-in-command; [Craig Roberts](#) ("[Submarine](#)") as a frat recruit known as Assjuice; and standup comic [Hannibal Buress](#) as a laid back police officer. And how long can [Christopher Mintz-Plasse](#) get away with a resume full of variations on his McLovin character?

But no one holds the screen like Mac and Kelly's big-eyed darling of a daughter, played by twins Elise and Zoey Vargas. Universal, the studio behind "Neighbors," may want to consider putting her outtakes online judging by the chorus of "awws" heard whenever she shows up.

A coda before the end credits that finds Mac and Teddy connecting shirtlessly outside an Abercrombie & Fitch provides welcome closure. Be forewarned, however: If this movie becomes popular, car airbags are destined to become the new whoopee cushions.

POPULAR BLOG POSTS

Things crashing into other things: or, my superhero movie problem Matt Zoller Seitz

Why aren't superhero movies more special?

The Unloved, Part 2: John Carter Scout Tafoya

The Unloved, Scout Tafoya's video essay series about critically reviled films that deserve more respect, continues wi...

You Just Might Find: The Midseason Finale of "Mad Men" Libby Hill

Libby Hill takes a look at the last few episodes of the 2014 season of "Mad Men."

Cannes: Ryan Gosling's "Lost River" earns derision, but dazzles too Ben Kenigsberg

Ryan Gosling's feature directorial debut is hardly the "disasterpiece" detractors claim.

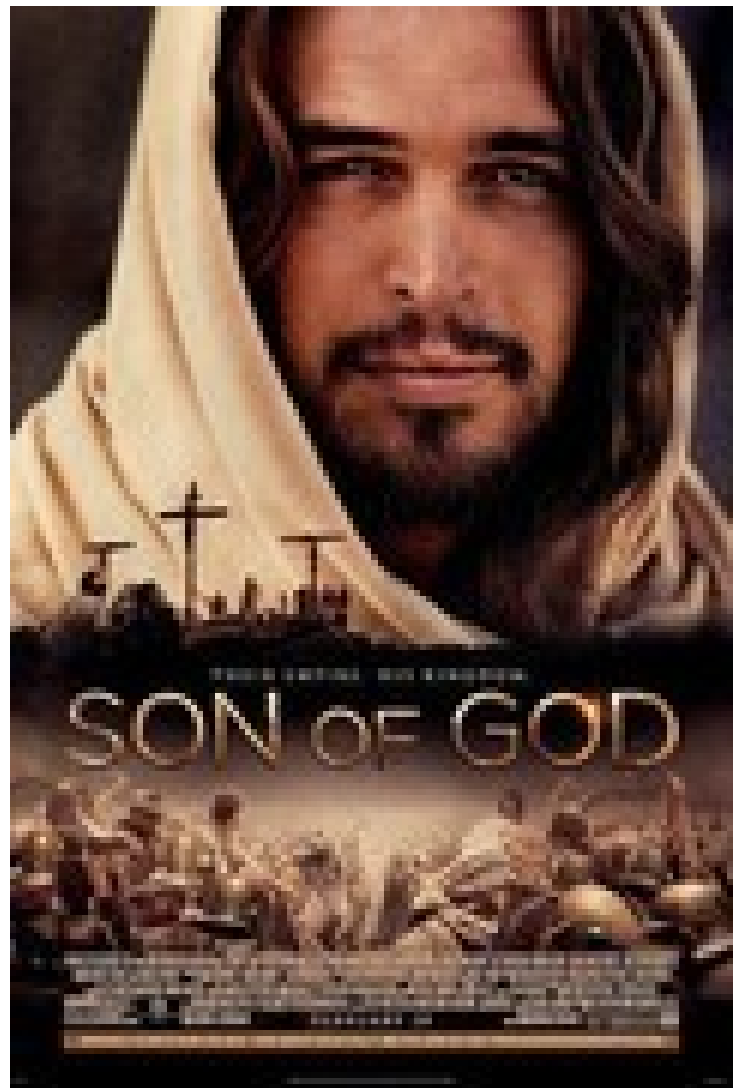## POPULAR REVIEWS

X-Men: Days of Future Past
★★☆

Godzilla
★★★☆

Moms' Night Out
★ ⤹

Son of God
★ ★

Reveal Comments

NEIGHBORS (2014)

Cast	
Seth Rogen *as Mac Radner*	
Rose Byrne *as Kelly Radner*	
Zac Efron *as Teddy Sanders*	
Dave Franco *as Pete*	
Ike Barinholtz *as Jimmy*	
Halston Sage *as Brooke*	
Christopher Mintz-Plasse *as Scoonie*	
Lisa Kudrow *as Carol Gladstone*	
Hannibal Buress *as Officer Watkins*	
Jason Mantzoukas *as Dr. Theodorakis*	

Director

Nicholas Stoller

Screenplay

Andrew J. Cohen

Brendan O'Brien

Cinematography

Michael Andrews

Comedy

Rated R for pervasive language, strong crude and sexual content, graphic nudity, and drug use throughout
96 minutes

WATCH THIS MOVIE

Fandango

A   D   V   E

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR MAILING LIST

Enter Your Email Address
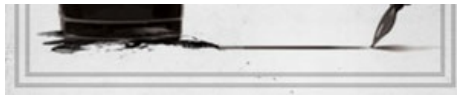
Subscribe

A   D   V   E

The Ebert Club

The Ebert Club is our hand-picked selection of content for Ebert fans. You will receive a weekly newsletter full of movie-related tidbits, articles, trailers, even the occasional streamable movie. Club members also get access to our members-only section on RogerEbert.com

Premiere Member : $20.00USD - yearly

Subscribe

REVIEWS RSS

IN THEATERS

►

● ● ● ● ● ●

★ ◁ Blended

★ ★ Cold in July

★ ★ ★ Stand Clear of the Closing Doors

★ The Angriest Man in Brooklyn

★ ★ ★ ★ The Dance of Reality

★ ◁ Words and Pictures

★ ★ ◁ X-Men: Days of Future Past

★ A Night in Old Mexico

★ ★ ★ Ai Weiwei: The Fake Case

★ ◁ Chinese Puzzle

MOVIE REVIEWS

Reviews

Great Movies

CHANNELS

Cannes

Demanders

Interviews

CONTRIBUTORS

Roger Ebert   Craig D. Lindsey

Chaz Ebert   Marsha McCreadie

Matt Zoller Seitz   Patrick Z. McGavin

Simon Abrams
Ali Arikan
Jim Beaver
Steven Boone
Danny Bowes
Dave Bunting
Sean Burns
Dan Callahan
Christopher Campbell
Jen Chaney
Godfrey Cheshire
Seongyong Cho
Olivia Collette
Edward Copeland
Brian Doan
Aurore Duiguo
Justine Elias
Steve Erickson
Sam Fragoso
Bruce Fretts
Michael A. Gonzales
Ian Grey
Scott Jordan Harris
Odie Henderson
Rowan Kaiser
Wael Khairy
Ben Kenigsberg
Glenn Kenny
Joyce Kulhawik
Kevin B. Lee
Christy Lemire
Donald Liebenson

Nell Minow
Michael Mirasol
Jana Monji
Omar Moore
Omer M. Mozaffar
Lisa Nesselson
Scott Nye
Michał Oleszczyk
Sheila O'Malley
R. Kurt Osenlund
Kartina Richardson
Alyssa Rosenberg
Lisa Rosman
Nick Schager
Barbara Scharres
Charlie Schmidlin
Tom Shales
Krishna Bala Shenoi
Peter Sobczynski
Bill Stamets
Scout Tafoya
Brian Tallerico
ReBecca Theodore-Vachon
Katherine Tulich
Gerardo Valero
Pablo Villaça
Ignatiy Vishnevetsky
Grace Wang
Anath White
Max Winter
Susan Wloszczyna

About the Site   Contact Us   Privacy Policy   Terms of Use

Movies by Letter   Cast and Crew