

'Hornet' is all buzz, no sting



BY KEN DUSOLD
Staff Reviewer

It should be made known at the onset of this review that Seth Rogen is a good comedic actor. He has proven capable of turning a pretty good script into a huge box office success — as shown in the 2007 hit "Knocked Up." His ability as a comedic writer shines through in the Judd Apatow films "Superbad" and "Pineapple Express."

Unfortunately, action films like "The Green Hornet" do not seem to be Rogen's forte. The newest addition to the superhero film genre — written and produced by its star — fails to incite anything other than a few well-meaning laughs during its two-hour long quest to achieve the cinematic glory and fanfare of DC Comic heroes Batman and Superman.

Rogen's signature calm and rational party-man persona is the personality of Britt Reid, a.k.a. the Green Hornet. Adapted from the 1930s radio program, Rogen's Reid is not the debonair newspaper

publisher depicted in the character's original incarnation. Rather, the noble crime fighter is denigrated to the role of the embarrassing offspring of a brilliant and principled media-mogul (Tom Wilkinson). When his father unexpectedly dies from an apparent bee sting, the wild child is left to run the family empire without any knowledge of journalism or business.

After this major twist in the character's motivations and background, we are faced with the first example of thin writing in the picture's script. Reid somehow must become the Green Hornet. Rogen and co-writer Evan Goldberg sloppily manage to derive Reid's desire to save people from an experience in which he tried to stand up to bullies in elementary school. This "heart of gold" determination to help victims of gang crimes is otherwise absent from the Reid we see throwing mini-refrigerators out of motel windows near the film's beginning.

Helping the Green Hornet fight bad guys is trusty sidekick and superb espresso-maker, Kato (Jay

Chou). While a talented martial artist, Chou has no individual presence on screen and relies completely on Rogen throughout the film. The one-dimensionality of the character means ruin for an attempted plot-driven romance between Kato and Reid's secretary, Lenore (Cameron Diaz). For any romance on film to work, deeper character development than that found in "The Green Hornet" is needed.

As the film's leading lady, Diaz leaves something to be desired. When we are introduced to Lenore, she seems like a ditzzy, blonde bombshell with nothing more to offer than her body. In the next scene, she impresses Reid with her journalism knowledge — but the performance does not impress us. Diaz plays the rest of the film as if she is trying too hard to act.

The inclusion of last year's Academy Award-winner for best supporting actor, Christoph Waltz, adds little to the film. Again playing a psychopathic villain, Waltz seems indifferent to the character or plot. One gets the inkling that

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Photo courtesy of rottentomatoes.com
Kato and Britt Reid, men hoping to become heroes, disguised behind villain rumors, escape an ambush from a rival gangster.

he might not have his heart in the project.

The movie's use of 3-D serves as a technical gimmick. Is it cool to watch Kato leap across cars and appear to come right at you? Sure. Is it necessary to the plot? As usual, the answer to this question is an emphatic no. While 3-D does not take anything of substance away from "The Green Hornet," it doesn't add anything of focus to the film either.

As already stated, Rogen is funny. This highlights the film's chief strength: A touch of humor. Chuckles are genuine and rarely forced. Late in the film, a scene that has Reid retracting his request for medical assistance from Lenore

should incite, at the very least, wide smiles from viewers. However, humor is a minor aspect of the entire work, which is primarily a superhero movie with plenty of action.

Things blow up, people get shot, car chases ensue and of course the Black Beauty (the Green Hornet's car) is pimped out to rival James Bond's Aston Martin. However, beyond the bare essentials needed for an action film, "The Green Hornet" is left with a flimsy plot and perfunctory characters. While the possibility of a franchise ultimately hangs on this movie's final box office receipts, let's hope Rogen reconsiders this superhero idea and sticks to comedy.

Movie review board has bizarre standards



Discrimination is found within rating system's standards

BY MEG BURIK
Columnist

When I turned 17, the R-rated silver-screen world of drugs, sex, violence and language opened its arms to me. No more did I need my parents to accompany me to R-rated movies had often lead to awkward moments (ie, watching "American Pie" with my mom). A whole new cinematic experience awaited me. Sometimes I wondered who determined that the day I became 17, I suddenly held the keys to maturity that I didn't the day before.

Jack Valenti, retired former chairman of the Motion Picture Association of America dreamt up an independent review board of films, a board that could tag movies with the parental cautionary rat-

ings of G through NC-17. The choice to create such a review board came at a time of great social change, 1968, and without it the film industry might have faced government censorship, according to filmratings.com. The creation of discretionary ratings seemed to quiet the voices shouting for prudence in American films.

The purpose of the rating system is "to give parents clear, concise information about a film's content in order to help them determine whether a movie is suitable for their children," according to filmratings.com. Valenti describes the people on the ratings board as ordinary people who speak for the parents of America. What type of parent is the standard American parent? This obviously is some kind of mythical ideal that can speak for the values of all movie-going Americans. No ordinary human could possibly know what values

represent all of America. Yet, the board consists of eight to 13 people, supposedly with children between the ages of five and 17, without any previous association with the film industry. It is difficult to verify these qualifications, however, because the raters are kept anonymous to shield from "outside pressure."

In the documentary "This Film is Not Yet Rated," director Kirby Dick questions the nuances of this rating system and the raters involved and reveals the double standard between ratings for various movies.

Technically, the rating board is not a censorship board. However, the difference between an R-rating and an NC-17 rating is whether an under-17-year-old is allowed admittance to the movie unaccompanied by an of-age guardian. Not only does this rating prevent the underage from viewing the content of the movie, a kind of censor-

ship, but NC-17 rating versus an R-rating could mean millions of dollars lost in the box office. Also, many of the large chains that carry movies, such as Walmart or Blockbuster, don't carry NC-17 movies, according to the documentary. NC-17 filmmakers are hard-pressed to get the audience they need to make money at the box office.

Maybe you are thinking the directors who get an NC-17 rating should just better edit their films, or perhaps that content really should be restricted to those older than 17. But movies are an art form, and to edit out artistic choices is to deviate from the artistic intention. The decision as to what point an orgasm stops being artistic and starts being gratuitous is left to these raters, the perfect, mythical value-judging parents to decide.

Rating decisions have scary implications for the values of the "mythical parent" the board is supposed to represent. Violence, such as gunfire

and murder, often receives a lower rating than sex. The first time I watched "Kill Bill," I was 14. All the blood, although unrealistic and campy, almost made me sick, and this was an R-rating. A few years later I saw the innocent but honest movie "Kissing Jessica Stein" about a bi-curious straight woman with just a few hints of sex, which received an R-rating. In comparison, the violence in "Kill Bill" seemed like something that should be beyond NC-17, into the translucent world of "unrated." If the sex in movies shows anything unorthodox, such as sex positions besides missionary, or, God forbid, gay sex, might draw closer scrutiny and a harsher rating.

"This Film is Not Yet Rated" presents a series of side-by-side shots of gay sex scenes that have earned an NC-17 rating versus straight sex scenes that have received R-ratings. The overall trend shows more graphic sex between heterosexuals, and with the judgment of a lower rating is the judgment that homosexuality is something from which to protect children. Apparently the average American parent, represented by the board, hasn't an open-minded bone in his or her body.

Violence is more tolerated in movies than sex.

When flagrant violence is permissible for teenagers of all ages to watch on screen, surely they start to become desensitized to it or even view it as heroic. They might think, "Hey, if Vin Diesel can do it, I can too." The movie industry often conveniently leaves out all the reverberations of war beyond the battle scenes — the civilians caught in the crossfire, the prisoners of war, the aftermath of the supposed heroics. But an orgasm that lasts too long gets slapped with an NC-17 rating and no one younger than 17 is permitted to see it.

This "mythical parent" that the raters of movies represent probably would picket with signs that say: "Make war, not love" (at least not "out of the ordinary" love). It's the type of parent that would encourage bullying and fights to solve problems, as violence is permitted in heavy doses in movies that hold a PG-13 rating. It's the type of parent that sends sexually questioning kids to gay therapy, because that behavior is not acceptable in polite society. It's the type of parent that has the audacity to think that he or she has the same ideals as all American parents, an obvious impossibility. It's the type of parent that I would keep far away from my hypothetical children.



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