

Forgetting Forgetting Sarah Marshall is easy

Screenplay by Jason Segel

Directed by Nicholas Stoller

Jason Segel ... Peter Bretter
Kristen Bell ... Sarah Marshall
Mila Kunis ... Rachel Jansen
Russell Brand ... Aldous Snow
Steve Landesberg ... Dr. Rosenbaum
Paul Rudd ... Chuck

Sarah Marshall: When were you planning on telling me this?

Aldous Snow: I just told you, then.

Sarah Marshall: Yeah. No, I know. But telling me now isn't really the same as telling me.

Aldous Snow: Well, look, you know, I've not told you I've got genital herpes, because it's not inflamed at the moment . . .

One of the wittier passages in this *tres* popular movie!

Here's another movie I really wanted to like, as it was recommended by my new young friend Gator Bait—my nickname for a 20-something who plays golf in our post-season scrambles on Thursday nights (and is a big fan of the University of Florida Gators)—and our favorite afterwards' waitress, lovely Nikki... also 20-something. They were both huge fans of Dark Knight, too... which I panned (but not without respect for the artistry). Just an honest difference of opinion and taste.

So I'm with my significant other and we need to make a quick move at the video store last Saturday night, and I insist on Forgetting Sarah Marshall because from GB and Nikki I think for sure this one is going to be a laughfest. As a reviewer, I try to stay connected with what the Youth of America finds appealing in the world of modern cinema, and sometimes it works out. For example, Suburban Girl, Juno, and Waitress are only three of the more recent works featuring younger actors and younger themes that get high marks in my book.

Full of high hopes, I set the DVD loose in the player and prepare for the best. Through the first scenes involving far too many seconds of gratuitous male nudity of the the main character Peter Bretter (Jason Segel)—isn't most male nudity in movies gratuitous?—we both stay the course thinking, "Well, it's certainly not going to continue in this vein." We've just seen the initiating breakup scene, where Sarah (Kristen Bell) arrives to Peter's apartment to give him the bad news, and he starts crying standing there and running around in the altogether. In the next few weeks Peter thrashes about having bouts of depression—personally I don't see getting all broken up over this little Superficial Sarah—and meaningless sex, which, again, doesn't have to be anywhere near that explicit to get the point across.

Indeed, if there's one main objection I want to make covering the entire film, it's that writer and/or director seem to want to make physically explicit every conceivable interaction among the characters—especially scenes that might otherwise be humorous in subtlety and implication. We don't get to have any imagination. And what we do see is frankly often graceless or gross, e.g. a scene toward the end where Sarah desperately works to give Peter an erection despite his loss of love for her. Sorry, I don't regard that as much of a spoiler... though it sure would have spoiled my SO's appreciation if she'd stuck around that long to see it. No patience; she bailed after 10 minutes.

But trying to keep an open mind, I did like the premise of the movie: man loses woman, is totally crushed, and decides that taking a long vacation in Hawaii may be just the thing to remove woman from his mind once and for all. Only problem, Hawaii—in fact, the very resort hotel man books—seems to be woman's favorite hangout. (Sarah is a celebrity on a crime series, and Peter writes the score; this is how they meet

and fall in love for five-plus years.) The movie gives the impression that very public Sarah has been going to this same resort-hotel for years, even while she's been with Peter.

So does Peter not know there's a strong likelihood she'll show up? Or does he know and, thus, hold out hope that Sarah will show up and be influenced to come back to him? Who knows. Maybe I mistook the plotlines. There were a couple of decent dialog lines: lemme see, it was when the big black bartender said something about sex, I think, or was it the surfer dude—Chuck played by Mark Rudd, but not sure—who was supposed to have some weed, but didn't, and he winds up giving Peter some totally bizarre surfing instructions, which were supposed to be funny, and then there was that sight gag on his friend's video camera when Peter instructs his friend's wife to move her head up and down in an unawares' simulation of oral sex. It don't get much better than that.

But the critics can't be wrong (Rotten Tomatoes critics = 85%), and the people can't be wrong (RT popular = 87%). So what am I bitching about, eh? In fact, here's a typical comment from one of the top critics, Michael Phillips of the Chicago Tribune: "Jason Segel has what Nicolas Cage and Gene Wilder and a precious handful of other witty actors have: The ability to make egregious humiliation and painful neediness a source of limitless mirth." Personally, I think Michael is smoking ropey dopey. Certainly "the painful neediness and egregious humiliation" (not to mention the numerous miniature grossouts and puzzling plot incongruities) are a source of something... but it ain't mirth. More like pure astonishment that I'm sitting here wasting my time watching sequence after wholly unbelievable sequence—thinking if I just hang on for another 20 minutes it's really going to get good. I didn't find it funny because fundamentally I didn't find it conceivable, and I didn't care about the characters for the same reason.

But as the old man used to say, "That's what makes horse races."

My SO and I wind up way baffled as to what would make this movie attractive to, well, anyone with a brain and a heart in working order. Well, the heart I can kind of see, because Segel is so ingratiating as to be pathetic in a way that might be seen as refreshing? And there were some good comic scenes: Well, okay, when Sarah's new boyfriend the hermaphroditish pop star Aldous Snow performs a love song on stage for Sarah that he loves to be "Inside Her," complete with pelvic thrusts and gyrations, that's ROFL[1] material for sure.

My recommendation to young and older: Save your money.

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[1] Roll on the floor laughing.

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Forgetting Sarah Marshall | Jason Segel | Kristen Bell | Romantic Tragedy