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TV The Journal view



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The MTV Movie Awards marks 20 irreverent years

Jason Sudeikis hosts the 2011 MTV Movie Awards on Sunday.

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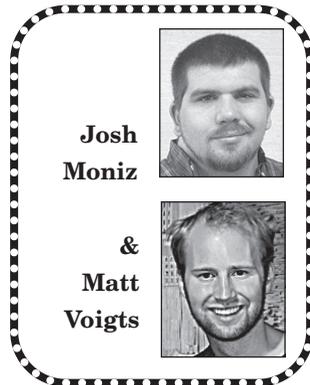
Double Take: "The Hangover: Part II"

Josh: Bigger and better, but lacking heart, Matt: Save your beer money

W **Josh:** "The Hangover Part II" is a rare movie that succeeds at doing the same thing as the original, but bigger and better. The jokes are funnier and dark, and the story had more room to develop.

However, the film sacrifices its biggest strength, its degree of plausibility, for the sake of playing on a larger scale. The result is the funniest moments of the franchise, but less entertainment overall. Part of what made the original great was that no matter how ridiculous the cast's antics were, each insane act was only an amplified version of something you or your friend could do while binge drinking. "Hangover II" lacks that because of its scale, for better and for worse.

The best bits from the film were Zach Galifianakis' return as the man-child of the group and Ed Helm's return as the group's "voice of reason," who, ironically, was responsible for the most extreme acts of the night. The film does ratchet up the scale of their drunken antics in a pleasantly surprising way. The use of a drug-dealing monkey (who is essentially both the baby and the tiger from the first film) actually



**Josh
Moniz**

**&
Matt
Voigts**

adds another funny character to the film.

The film's weakness is its inconsistency. Extreme parts like gross-out infidelities, lost fingers and gunshots are treated as throw-away jokes, but mundane stuff, like the threat of disappointing an already disapproving father-in-law, is treated as a life-or-death problem. And, the film makes the mistake of actually crossing moral lines. The first film was smart enough to have the cast go to the edge of moral repugnance, but never actually cross the threshold. This film crosses the threshold, particularly with the infidelity and body hiding scenes. The benefit is people that watched the first film get a funny surprise, but the tradeoff is that you're unable to identify with them as much. Also, the film criminally underuses Bradley Cooper, who was a surprise hit as the jerkish but good-hearted friend. In this film, he barely does anything and is slightly less likable than last time.



The gang from "The Hangover" are shocked to realize they are in the same film again.

Matt: I'll admit it – I haven't seen the first "Hangover," the highest-grossing R-rated comedy of all time. I don't know how Ed Helms and friends' whacky prenuptial adventures in Thailand compare to their Vegas ones. I don't know which parts are clever callbacks to part one, and which are wholesale recycled. But I can say that, standing on its own, "The Hangover, Part II" feels like a concept in search of a story – and jokes, for that matter.

Leading the show – and its appeal and problems – is Todd Phillips ("Old School," "Due Date"), the poor man's Judd Apatow. In the decade following the late-90s gross-out comedy resurgence, both filmmakers have built careers making movies that focus as much on characters as raunch. Apatow's characters, however, are as complex as they are exaggerated, and "The 40-Year Old Virgin," "Knocked Up," and "Forget-

ting Sarah Marshall" are all tenderly sympathetic stories about how these characters confront thwarted aspirations and strive toward maturity. Also, they are funny.

Phillips' regressive man-children, however, aren't near as deep, and they don't change much – except to escape the doldrums of their adult lives by partying like they're still in college – something epitomized by the fact that most contextual clues indicate "Hangover II's" characters are doing pretty much the same thing they did in the last movie. Not that this is inherently a bad climate for comedy, but watching a bunch of idiots make the same exact stupid mistakes again (even if this case, I was technically watching it for the first time) does lose the novelty and surprise, two elements that figured heavily into a lot of people's enjoyment of Part I. It also doesn't help that

Phillips seems to think that situations involving, say, mistaken identity in a Thai brothel, are funny in and of themselves. This is what Josh is talking about with the lack of gravity afforded the raunchy parts. The best dirty comedies have a manic sense of energy, a giggly belief that they are being transgressive, 'getting away with something' – one of many reasons why "Hangover II" feels rote, and, say, "Pink Flamingos" is still hilarious and depraved almost 40 years after its release.

Josh: I think Matt makes a fair point here. A problem that this film has is that it rest too much on your knowledge and expectations of the characters from the first film. In the first film, you enjoy the surprise in the plot that they actually lose one of their friends. In this one, you already know what's coming, so it's harder to invest. In the first film, the characters made an engaging, but pleasantly plausible growth as characters. Cooper's character remains a jerk but is less severe about it, while Helm's character learns to stick up for himself. In this film, none of the characters advance or develop.

Matt: I have heard from a number of people that the first film is better, and I will leave here on some positive notes. The supporting cast – including Paul Giamatti and a returning Ken Jeong – try their best with the material

and are usually entertaining when on camera. "Hangover II" isn't the first movie to show off Thailand's urban and natural environments, but the wonder and grime are impressively detailed. They give hope to anyone who has ever wanted to loosely structure a film around his or her vacation and have it earn \$135 million opening weekend.

Josh: You'll laugh and have fun with the first viewing, but there's no point in watching it again.

Matt: The summer's just beginning. Go outside, get some fresh air, and head back to the theater when you have a better reason.

Josh: 6.5/10, Matt: 3.5/10

Synopsis:

The gang from "The Hangover" returns for another bachelor party, this time on the outskirts of Bangkok, Thailand. They repeat their mistakes by gaining on a drunken bender that they must piece back together the next day in order to find a missing companion.

Starring: Ed Helms, Bradley Cooper and Zach Galifianakis.

Director: Todd Phillips
Writer: Craig Mazin, Scot Armstrong and Todd Phillips

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