Entertainment

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF "OLD SCHOOL"
SOME GUYS JUST CAN'T HANDLE VEGAS
HANGOVER THE
FEEL IT JUNE 5

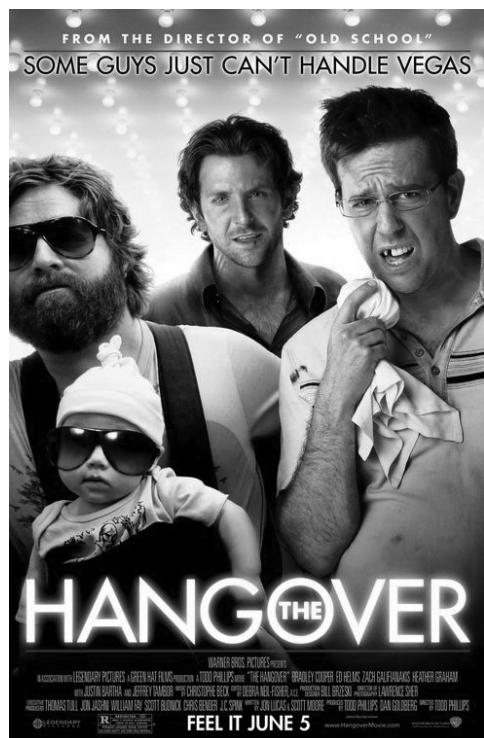## THE HANGOVER

When a groom-to-be ends up missing after a wild night in Vegas, his two best friends and future brother-in-law try to find him by piecing together what occurred since none of them can remember anything. Comedy/Rated R.

It's supposed to be a big day for Doug Billings (Justin Bartha) and Tracy Garner (Sasha Barrese). After all, they're to be married in just a few hours, but there's one little hitch. Doug's best friends, teacher Phil Wenneck (Bradley Cooper) and dentist Stu Price (Ed Helms), along with Tracy's goofball brother, Alan (Zach Galifianakis), seem to have lost the groom.

Having traveled from Los Angeles to Las Vegas for some bachelor party festivities, the foursome apparently partied so hard that they don't remember what happened or know what's come of Doug. The story then rewinds two days when Phil, Stu and Alan regain consciousness the morning after, with Doug missing.

In his place is a tiger in the bathroom, a baby in the closet, and Stu missing a tooth, but with a wedding band on his finger, indicating he's now married to stripper Jade (Heather Graham). That's bad news for him, considering his live-in girlfriend, Melissa (Rachel Harris), cuts him no slack.

But they have bigger concerns, what with the repercussions of the drugs that dealer Black Doug (Mike Epps) gave Alan and consequently got them in trouble, not only with the law, but also an effeminate but ruthless crime figure, Mr. Chow (Ken Jeong), as well as former boxing champion Mike Tyson (Mike Tyson) who isn't too pleased with the foursome's previous nighttime outing.

With time running out and only scant memories of what they did, the trio try to find Doug by piecing together what happened on that wild night.

Our take: 4 out of 10

Like many a college student back when the drinking age was 18, I was known to have a beer or two back in the '80s. Yet, until one fateful night and the following morning, I never suffered from the dreaded hangover. That all changed thanks to a winter sorority dance, a heating system gone amuck, and rum and Cokes downed like ice water to keep us from passing out.

Ah, the irony of that last part. I was lucky that the dance was within walking distance of my dorm as I don't recall a thing from some part of that evening until the next morning. That's when the inevitable post drinking blues and queasy questions arose regarding what occurred during the memory blackout.

Was it funny to me and/or others? Did I do something embarrassing? Or was it otherwise uneventful? Without undergoing some sort of regressive hypnosis, I only have sketchy eyewitness accounts to go on, but it's a chapter in my life I'd rather forget, if I could only remember it in the first place.

At least it didn't occur before my wedding or that of one of my friends as happens in the appropriately titled "The Hangover." A decidedly adult comedy that has its share of amusing moments but isn't as outrageously funny as so many other critics are claiming, the film will likely appeal to guys who enjoy sharing their "war stories" about similar wild nights and subsequent hangovers, as well as to women who will enjoy watching bachelor party attendees getting what they (the ladies) believe is deserved comeuppance for a night of debauchery.

There's certainly potential aplenty -- albeit in cinematic comedy shafts previously mined many times before -- in the premise concocted by screenwriters Jon Lucas & Scott Moore. After briefly setting up the scenario of three friends (Justin Bartha, Bradley Cooper and Ed Helms) along with the groom-to-be's pending and decidedly oddball brother-in-law (Zach Galifianakis) setting off from L.A. to Vegas for the obligatory bachelor party excursion, the three wake up to find their hotel suite trashed. Oh, and there's also a live tiger in the bathroom, a baby in the closet, and the dentist among them missing a tooth. Then there's the minor detail that the groom is now missing and no one can remember what happened.

Like a bunch of inept but determined detectives, the trio sets out to backtrack their way through the evening using scant clues to try to piece together what went down and figure out where their friend is located. Their discoveries and interaction with a varied assortment of characters -- including Heather Graham playing a stripper, Ken Jeong has a vindictive, gay Asian gangster, Mike Epps as an inept drug dealer and Mike Tyson as himself -- are supposed to the source of laughs.

It doesn't help that the film's trailer has already served to spoil the bigger jokes. Granted, that isn't the film's fault but rather that of the marketing department. Even so, with the various surprise elements and related humor having previously been revealed in the ads, a lot of the initial fun and laughs don't have as much punch as they could and should have.

Then again, director Todd Phillips ("School For Scoundrels," "Starsky & Hutch," "Old School") isn't exactly known for terribly creative, innovative or smart comedy and he continues that trend here. Working from the previously mentioned duo's script, he goes for the easy laughs, be that the swishy villain (Jeong), the bitchy girlfriend (Rachel Harris) or the goofball doofus (Galifianakis).

The latter occasionally elicited a chuckle from yours truly, but that first element is offensive and repetitive, while the middle is simply grating. Toss in some throwaway material (old nude people) and stuff that's been done to death before (the signature riding down the escalator scene from "Rain Man") and the film doesn't exactly aim for any great heights. Not that it has to as long as it smartly and effectively wallows around in its lesser material, but the cast and crew only occasionally manage to do that to any notable extent.

Okay, considering the glowing reviews the film is receiving from other critics, perhaps the film caught me on an off day where I didn't fully get caught up in the comedy (be that of the normal, goofy and sometimes fairly black variety) like everyone else.

I'll admit that it does have its moments and should highly entertain its target audience. But it's clearly no masterpiece as some are attesting, and doesn't have the degree of added charm or characters you end up caring about that make most of the films from the Judd Apatow camp more entertaining and a step above this offering. And no amount of sorority dance drinks is going to make me forget that. "The Hangover" rates as a 4 out of 10.   Courtesy of Screenit.com •