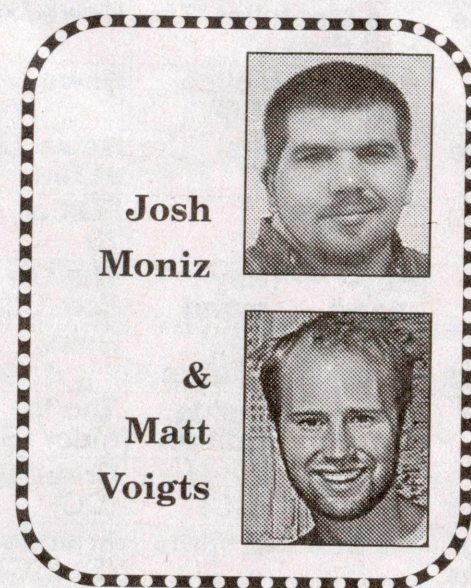


# Double Feature: "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules"

**Josh: "Wimpy Kid 2" fails in comparison**  
**Matt: Modest is better than annoying**

**Josh:** There have been many negative reviews about "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules," which surprises me. I think it's a perfectly acceptable children's movie. I suspect that the film gets bad press because it doesn't really stack up against the higher quality children's films that audiences have come to expect. The modern children's movies entertain both kids and adults without sacrificing originality. If this movie came out in the early '90s, people would be more appreciative of this standard film. Nowadays, this film can't really compete against film like "Rango" and "Toy Story 3."

The film's strength is the constant battle between the main character and his older brother. The relationship seems realistic enough with the love/hate dynamic that all older siblings have with their younger siblings. The two constantly struggle to get each other back for the last stunt pulled, whether by tattling to mom or threatening to read the film's titular diary aloud. But, the funniest bits involve the brothers working together, the best one involving them replacing a ruined bathroom door to conceal the party they had while the parents were



away. However, they realize too late that the new door doesn't have a lock like the old one. Rather than giving in, they unite to try and convince the parents that the lock never existed. It's funny how long they are able to keep up the lie until they're discovered.

The film's weakness is that it just feels like an extended episode of a show from the Disney Channel. The majority of the plot is just an excuse to set up the few good jokes. The mother character also got on my nerves. Her character does literally nothing in the film but act awkward in a forced manner.

**Matt:** A story like this is all in the telling, and I can see how it must have worked better with stick figures on paper. That's not an insult. I know people who enjoy the books, and simple drawings interspersed with short words seem a fitting way to give voice to pre-adolescent angst. As a movie, however,



Devon Bostick and Zachary Gordon in "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules."

it does seem like just another movie. As Josh said, it can't compare in slickness to more elaborate CGI productions or the well-oiled 'tween' marketing machine of the Disney Channel.

However, it is a thoroughly pleasant, understated little movie, standing in contrast to the horrors that lurked in the trailers. Jim Carrey will soon be teaching flightless birds to dance to "Ice Ice Baby" in what is alleged to be an adaptation of "Mr. Popper's Penguins." Is "Wimpy Kid" sitcom bland? Perhaps. But it didn't make my brain hurt. I doubt I'll be able to say the same for "Rio."

I think the movie does an admirable job of leveraging its own modest, relatable stakes of sibling and family bonding and rivalry. I'm also amazed at how effective the movie is at keeping an inoffensive, all-ages tone

while sidestepping potentially risqué subject matter. Chief among this is the "wild house party" during which the bathroom door is defaced. In the aftermath, people are passed out, trash is everywhere, and the family's furniture somehow wound up on the lawn – but all involved beverages have been clearly shown to be a non-alcoholic Coca-Cola-like product.

Much like the not-quite Coke, the whole movie has an 'off brand' air about it. Steve Zahn, as the father, looks almost, but not quite, like Justin Bateman. The mother appears as not-quite Tina Fey. Roderick is not quite James Franco, and wears a shirt whose logo that is not quite the Ramones'. Yet there's something blandly pleasant about all this. The movie opens with original music, and uses pop songs sparingly. I

did not spot any product placement. There are few jokes that revolve around bodily functions, save a scene that has the brothers bond over the classic gag of rubber vomit. The story may be unambitious, but it's not 'lowest common denominator' by any means, and the movie isn't schilling for anything but the books on which it's based.

**Josh:** Unfortunately, there isn't a ton to talk about because of how simple this film is. However, my favorite part of the film is when the kids watch the fictitious horror film the "The Foot." If the title isn't self-explanatory, the film-within-a-film is about a killer, disembodied foot. Personally, I think it's funny enough that I wish they would have made "The Foot" in real life.

**Matt:** I'm glad you mentioned "The Foot," which is pretty pitch perfect – film grain, titles, and all – as a G-rated parody of cheap 70s fare like "Death Bed: The Bed that Eats." The movie feels very comfortable in that sort of low stakes, competently done parody. It brings those well-worn sensibilities to a subplot involving young Greg and his friend's attempts to make a Youtube viral hit. These bits – including Greg's friend singing Kesha's "Tik Tok" – work better than they ought to in

part because of how unimportant they feel. They seem like something throw-away two middle school kids might actually do.

**Josh:** You could do a lot worse than this film, but I wouldn't suggest going out of your way to watch it.

**Matt:** Bland isn't necessarily bad. In the case of this kids' movie, it's occasionally charming and never obnoxious.

**Rating – Josh: 6/10, Matt: 6.5/10**

## Synopsis:

Seventh-grader Greg Heffley has his hands full trying to survive school while not embarrassing himself in front of the cute new girl in school. Perhaps even more frustrating, however, is his mother's insistence that he spend time with his older brother – who would much rather practice with his band, Löded Diper. Based on the book series by Jeff Kinney, which has sold over 40 million copies.

**Starring:** Zachary Gordon, Devon Bostick, Rachael Harris, Robert Capron and Steve Zahn  
**Directed by:** David Bowers  
**Screenplay by:** Gabe Sachs and Jeff Judah