

## Seasonal sequel finds reunited BFFs romancing and reminiscing

Written by Kam Williams

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When released back in 1999, "The Best Man" was dismissed by some as merely an African-American variation on "The Big Chill," and by others as the black male answer to the sassy sisters dishing the dirt in "Waiting to Exhale." But the romantic romp revolving around a sophisticated set of college grads was actually entertaining enough to stand on its own, and was even well-enough received to land a trio of NAACP Image Awards, including Best Picture.

Set 15 years later, "The Best Man Holiday" is an eagerly-anticipated sequel reuniting the principal ensemble for a mix of reminiscing, rivalry and sobering reality unfolding during a very eventful Christmas season. Written and directed by Malcolm Lee (Undercover Brother), the film features Morris Chestnut, Nia Long, Terrence Howard, Sanaa Lathan, Taye Diggs, Harold Perrineau, Regina Hall, Melissa De Sousa and Monica Calhoun reprising the roles they played in the first episode.

At the point of departure, we find the gang gathering at the sprawling mansion of Lance Sullivan (Chestnut), an NFL running back on the brink of retirement after a record-breaking career with the New York Giants. The God-fearing family man is relishing the prospect of spending more

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quality time with his wife, Mia (Calhoun), and their children.

Author Harper Stewart (Diggs), the best man at their wedding, had stirred-up considerable controversy in the original by writing a thinly-veiled account of his buddies' sexual exploits. This time around, he lands back in trouble when plans to publish a biography of host Lance come to light.

Furthermore, despite the fact that his wife, Robin (Lathan), is 9-months pregnant, Harper feels pangs of passion at first sight of his gorgeous ex-girlfriend, Jordan (Long). So, when her handsome beau (Eddie Cibrian) excuses himself to spend Christmas with his parents, it's just a matter of time before flirting leaves Harper in the dog house with Robin, too.

Meanwhile, nerdy Julian (Perrineau), who tied the knot with the stripper (Hall) he fell for way back at Lance's bachelor party, is currently worried that an old Youtube video of his scantily-clad spouse might surface, now that he's made an honest woman of her. Hard to ignore is Julian's flamboyant ex-girlfriend, Shelby (De Sousa), a drama-loving reality-TV star.

All of the above is cleverly commented upon by the clownish Quentin (Howard), a one-man Greek chorus again supplying intermittent comic relief.

The multi-plotted storyline proves thoroughly absorbing for the duration, feverishly alternating between fond reflections and fresh crises.

By viewing's end, all the loose ends are satisfactorily resolved, allowing for a memorable, if bittersweet sendoff, as well as a transparent setup of the franchise's next installment. Let's just hope it doesn't take Malcolm Lee 15 years to shoot another sequel!

Excellent (4 stars)

Rated R for profanity, sexuality, ethnic slurs and brief nudity

Running Time: 124 minutes

Distributor: Universal Pictures

To see a trailer for "The Best Man Holiday," visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=va7uNZS39ZY>