

LA WEEKLY

FILM REVIEWS

Reviews of Monster House, My Super Ex-Girlfriend and more

BY L.A. WEEKLY FILM CRITICS

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THE GREAT NEW WONDERFUL The month is September, we're told — via white letters against black — the place, New York City. Uh-oh! But the year, we are quickly assured, is 2002. This may seem cause for relief, but for five sets of New Yorkers struggling through life as the film unfolds, that grace of an extra year beyond 9/11 is the cause of fraught exchanges. For two youthful parents (Tom McCarthy and Judy Greer), days twist in knots around their hyperactive, possibly psychotic preadolescent son. For Sandie (Jim Gaffigan), a mild-mannered but tightly wound survivor of an unnamed calamity the year before (9/11 goes unmentioned for most of the film), things would be fine except for the goading of a dotty therapist (Tony Shalhoub) his employers have forced him to consult. (These scenes, with their madly inverted humor, are some of the weirdest and best comedy you'll find in any film out right now.) Finally, Emme (Maggie Gyllenhaal), a brilliant, ambitious cake designer, floats through life. The events of 9/11 have not directly touched her, though they eat at the soul of her bitterest rival (Edie Falco). Writer Sam Catlin and director Danny Leiner have fashioned an alert, shrewdly observed portrait of a moment in time. Harlan Bosmajian's fine cinematography and Robert Frazen's impeccable editing are especially crucial. In character study after character study, which successfully interweave and revolve with carousel force, formulaic story tensions do not and need not apply. Will such intensities make as much sense later, say, when this film is viewed in 2026? Would this film make anywhere near as much sense now if there had been no 9/11? No one can say. Grief — and that sense of living with consequences of events we did not invite — applies not just to the characters here, but to the rest of us. (Music Hall) (F.X. Feeney)