



## *Bedtime Stories*

**Adam Sandler, Keri Russell, and Guy Pearce star in a film written by Matt Lopez and Tim Herlihy and directed by Adam Shankman.**

By Josef Woodard

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In the unique comedy world according to Adam Sandler, childish pranks and protracted adolescent qualities rank high among his show biz personality traits. He talks in goofy tones somewhere between cartoony excess and an East Coast stoner speak, and teeters on the balancing points between silliness and substance.

In fact, some of the most interesting Sandler vehicles have been the one-offs to his usual shtick, whether in the art film brilliance of P.T. Anderson's *Punch-Drunk Love* or, from a completely different angle, Sandler's latest move, a foray into the family film universe.

Surprise, surprise, Sandler's role in *Bedtime Stories* scores high points for charm by drawing on kid-culture qualities he's always had going on. He also gives the family film genre a refreshing splash of new energy, and something for everyone to appreciate.

In the role of babysitter for his sister's children, Sandler, a hotel maintenance worker with visions of life in hotel management, plays the fun-loving uncle who loosens up the house rules (and the children's usual hyper-healthy diet regimen). Bedtime stories become a ritual in the house—not to mention a handy cinematic storytelling device, an excuse to sail off to distant shores and times in breakaway vignettes. The stories are also partly selfishly driven after Sandler discovers their prophetic powers.

Meanwhile, back in real time, some Hollywood clichés steadily are at work. In a standard plot turn, Sandler's red-blooded male response to the allure of a Paris Hilton-ish character (Teresa Palmer) is counterweighed against the earthier charms of the fellow babysitter, played by Keri Russell. Quirky touches in the story perk up the recipe, whether it's the comic relief-making bug-eyed guinea pig or the motif of raining gumdrops (an inside nod to *Magnolia*'s raining frogs, perhaps?).

Even if it's nothing remarkable, *Bedtime Stories* succeeds as a family film with something for a wide age range, thanks in no small part to the fact that closeted big kid Sandler lobs some nice curveballs into the game. "Haven't you heard?" Sandler says to a skeptical female in the film, "Goofy is the new handsome." Could be. If so, he's all over it.