

Despots need love too: 'The Dictator' gleeful exercise in bad taste



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The Dictator

Rating:

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There seems to be a rule that you have to show a penis in modern R-rated comedies and “The Dictator” is no exception. That the token penis shot is anticlimactic by the time they get to it should give you some idea of what you’re in for. The movie opens with a dedication to the memory of Kim Jong-Il, and if that doesn’t get the idea across, nothing will.

Sacha Baron Cohen, who co-wrote the screenplay, plays a North African dictator who risks his life to ensure that democracy never comes to the country he so lovingly oppresses. He agrees to address the UN to avoid military action, When a private security consultant (an unbilled **John C. Reilly**, as Archie Bunker in a suit), turns out to be a hitman, he finds himself on the streets of New York, without money or lackeys, and unrecognizable without his trademark beard.

This is just a twist on the old fish-out-of-water formula. But this is Sacha Baron Cohen, and even though he and director Larry Charles are going for a more traditionally structured movie this time around, he’s going to make you gasp. “The Dictator” takes the “Airplane” policy of throwing so many jokes at the audience that some of them have to stick. The ones that do, and

there are a lot of them, are in excruciatingly bad taste and they wouldn't be funny if they weren't. It's a gleeful exercise in bad taste, though, and it IS funny. What was actually in the script, and what was concocted on the set could make for interesting debate among film students. Did the script actually say INT. VAGINA—DAY?

Shock comedies of course **can't apologize** for their main character, and Cohen gets this. "The Dictator" gives its main character some vulnerability but has the sense not to let him have undergo too much of a character transformation. We can chuckle when **Megan Fox**, apparently joining a staggering list of Hollywood A-listers who have made some quick cash renting themselves out to Al Qaeda, won't stay to cuddle afterwards and he curls up with his pillow. Despots, it seems, need love too. But anything really maudlin would be fatal to this movie.

Anna Faris, cast against type as the manager of a vegan lesbian organic food store, who is constantly told she looks like a boy, does her best work to date. Ben Kingsley, who dresses a lot like Hamid Karzai here (do you suppose that might be intentional?), plays it straight and that's why it's funny.

"Seinfeld" alum Larry Charles, who also directed "Borat," has made a more polished-looking product here, but this is a shock comedy, through and through. This movie is making fun of its main character, who is a misogynistic, racist, homophobic, homicidal maniac. It makes fun of Americans' fear of terrorism and directly alludes to 9/11. It does have some fun at the expense of liberals, but saves the real barrage for the conservatives.

"The Dictator," continuing the current trend of very **short movie comedies**, only runs an hour and 20 minutes with credits. Which you should stay for, by the way. "The Dictator" would no doubt shock and offend some audiences, particularly if they don't get that the movie isn't adopting the main character's attitudes. Those viewers probably won't be buying tickets. Plenty of others will.