

# 'A Million Ways to Die in the West' misses the target

---



Lorey Sebastian © 2014 Universal Studios. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



Jim Dixon  
Fanboys Examiner  
| Follow:

---

A Million Ways to Die In the West  
Rating:

May 30, 2014

Actually, the movie doesn't demonstrate anywhere near a million ways to die in the west. Barely a dozen, in fact, but they're the funniest jokes in "A Million Ways to Die in the West." The title comes from the main character's complaint that everything in the old west can kill you. That sounds more like an SNL sketch than a feature, but star/co-writer/director Seth MacFarlane routinely loses it sight of it anyway, as his shaggy comedy escapes the coral and meanders

all over the spectacular landscape.

Perhaps the biggest problem is MacFarlane's decision to cast himself in the lead role, a sheep rancher named Albert who snarks his way through the movie with the sensibility of a high school hipster. This character would be annoying with an actual actor playing the part, and we don't have one. This is a little like watching a Shetland pony trying to carry John Wayne. Woody Allen got away with this sort of thing for years, as did Mel Brooks, but MacFarlane's screen presence is negligible in comparison to either. Bill Murray or Jim Carrey, at more appropriate ages, might have been able to make this work. MacFarlane simply doesn't have the charisma or the timing.

The movie's other major handicap, oddly, is too much plot. A reluctant hero who gets dumped by his shallow girlfriend (Amanda Seyfried) and then falls in love with the beautiful and unhappily married wife of a vicious outlaw could have been a straight western, though probably a Randolph Scott, rather than a Gary Cooper vehicle. The object of Albert's affections is Anna, played by Charlize Theron. Although this is Theron's most likeable performance in years, MacFarlane spends far too much time showing Albert falling in love with her, something the audience is likely to take on faith.

This is a vanity project from the get-go, and you have to believe that MacFarlane was simply unwilling to cut his own material. That's too bad, because "A Million Ways to Die in the West" would only have benefitted from gutting it by half an hour. At its core, this is a low-brow, shock comedy, and it doesn't need the story to make more than a modicum of sense to work. There are way too many improvised scenes that rely on anachronistic dialogue to be funny, and way too many scenes between Giovanni Ribisi and Sarah Silverman as his hooker girlfriend who's having sex with half the men in town for money but saving herself for marriage. The end result feels bloated and padded, particularly in an age when most R-rated comedies barely run 90 minutes.

It doesn't help that the jokes miss their target as often as Albert does practicing shooting at bottles. (He's a bad shot, in case that isn't clear.) There are a few genuine "Oh-no-they-didn't" moments, but many land with a leaden thud. A diarrhea sequence is excruciating, and the hatful of feces gets in front of the camera. Like a 5 yearold stand-up who thinks yelling "Poop!" is funny, MacFarlane's obviously got a thing for bodily excretions. Urine and semen also get close-ups. And what is the world coming to when the obligatory d\*\*k shot involves a sheep?

There are a few jokes that attempt contact with more cerebral areas of the brain, but it's an open question whether the predominantly young, male target audience will get them.

Liam Neeson phones in his performance as Charlize Theron's outlaw husband. Neil Patrick Harris plays MacFarlane's rival for the affections of Amanda Seyfried as Barney Stinson in handlebar moustache. At least he knows what he's doing. As for Ms. Seyfried, she isn't supposed to be likeable in her completely thankless role and succeeds, for whatever that's worth. The parade of unbilled cameos gets distracting after a while ("Oh look - it's Ryan Reynolds!"), but does demonstrate that MacFarlane has a lot of famous friends.

You used to have to check your guns at the city limits when you rode into Dodge City. With "A Million Ways to Die in the West," it's your brains you have to leave with the sheriff. The movie may nurse delusions of grandeur that it's a successor to "Blazing Saddles," but a repeat viewing Brooks' comic classic will unceremoniously put that notion to rest. ("Blazing Saddles," by the way, was half an hour shorter.) "A Million Ways to Die in the West" does benefit from gorgeous photography and spectacular New Mexico locations, and the score amusingly evokes classic western scores of the Elmer Bernstein variety.