

## Castrated comedy delivers small, shrivelled jokes

Despite recruiting Christopher Walken, *Balls of Fury* just can't bring any heat to the life-and-death world of underground table-tennis

### filmreview

#### **Balls of Fury**

Now Playing

Directed by Ben Garant

Starring Christopher Walken, and Dan Fogler

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Ever since Will Farrell perfected the modern stupid comedy with *Anchorman*, it seems like Hollywood pounced on what seemed to be an amazing new ticket-selling formula. *Dodgeball*, *Talladega Nights*, *Beerfest* and even *Anchorman* all share the same basic framework of ridiculous things happening to comedic stereotypes. The only problem is that the hilarity has declined with each passing blockbuster

until we end up with something like *Balls of Fury*, freshly cobbled together from the scrapped joke ideas of all those movies that came before.

The plot is cut-and-paste, a mere vehicle to bring audiences from one half-hearted joke to the next. Randy Daytona (Dan Fogler) was a child prodigy at table tennis until a stumble cost him a high-stakes match and his father's life, who was murdered by the mysterious Feng (Christopher Walken) after betting more than he could pay on his son to win said game.

Zoom 19 years into the future, and we find an obese Randy doing a matinee ping-pong trick show for a bored lunch crowd in Reno, Nevada—he does his big finish, awaits applause, and the camera cuts to a large, unimpressed man farting.

Suddenly, things take a turn for

the typically atypical: the FBI wants him to take up competitive ping-pong again so they can nail Feng on illegal gun-trafficking. Daytona's their man, because the only way they can reach Feng, an avid ping-ponger, is to getting invited to one of his underground, life-and-death tournaments. But after almost two decades, Daytona needs training, and who else to teach him but blind old Master Wong (James Hong), whose star pupil was Feng himself?

It's B-grade martial arts movie meets *Dodgeball*, with not enough of the former's kung-fu action or the latter's gags. Christopher Walken is restrained to the background, and as a result, he's too subdued to make his role as Fang comical. Fogler doesn't have the acting ability to sell Daytona as a leading man. The weak script has Daytona's love

interest, Maggie Wong (Maggie Q) telling him to back off, then, not ten minutes later, shooting him doe eyes and romantically wishing him good luck as he prepares for a match.

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All of these would be forgivable if the comedy held up, but the movie riffs on the same jokes for far too long: blind Master Wong looking or pointing the wrong way while talking to someone, and various characters getting hit

between the legs, for example. Some testicular humour was to be expected—nay, required—with a title like *Balls of Fury*, but apparently it was too much to hope for less predictable lead-ups than are found here. There's even a lip-synch/dance sequence, which is mercifully brief but falls flat regardless.

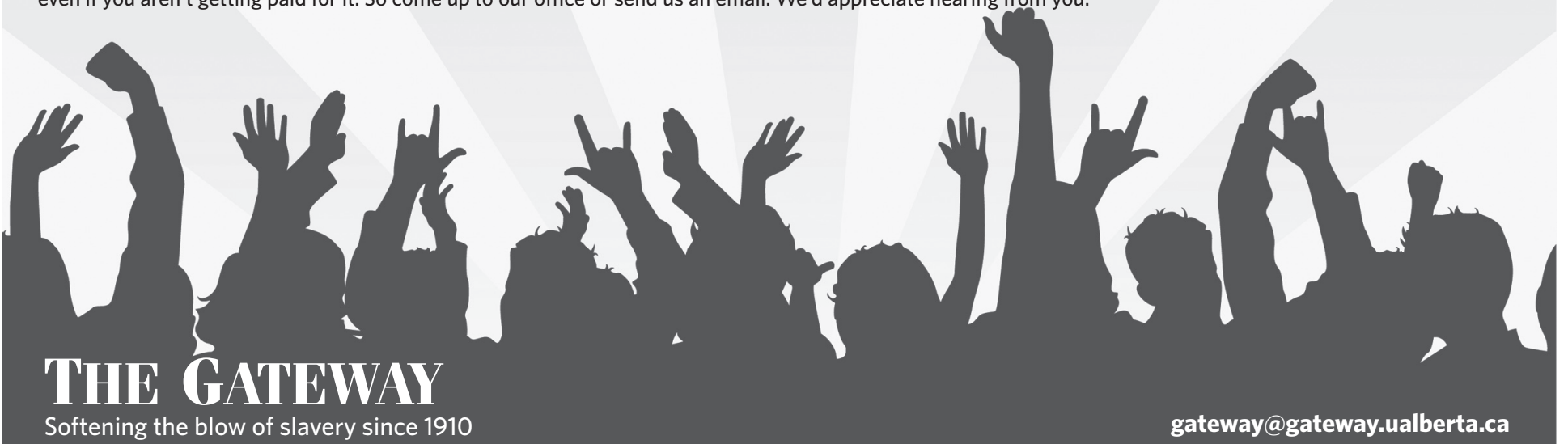
*Balls of Fury* is ridiculous, yes, but more and more stupid comedies are trying to pass off goofy people in amazing situations as being funny, all the while ignoring snappy dialogue and fresh material that could pour some life into a quickly dulling genre. At one point in the movie, the FBI tells Daytona that to get him to take this mission on, they're authorized by the government to give him anything within their powers. Apparently, a comedy that's grown a pair wasn't one of those things.

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