

Heartbreak sees Farrellys return to raunch

After a few years of toiling with tamer comedies, the Farrelly brothers reunite with Ben Stiller on their latest R-rated release

filmpreview

The Heartbreak Kid

Opens 5 October

Written and Directed

by the Farrelly Brothers

Starring Ben Stiller and Michelle

Monaghan

JOHN KMECH

Arts & Entertainment Staff

It's been ten years since *There's Something About Mary*; have the Farrelly Brothers lost their edge, or do they still have the ability to delight audiences by pulling out the frank and beans, along with some hair gel?

"This is a sex comedy," Peter Farrelly states, without hesitation. "And I mean a real sex comedy, like in the French tradition. We have nudity, you know."

Never known for their subtlety, Peter and brother Bobby are the fathers of the modern day raunch comedy, and they've returned in full force to the silver screen with their aforementioned romp, *The Heartbreak Kid*. A remake of Neil Simon's 1972 Oscar-nominated film, the original told the tale of a man who, while on his honeymoon, meets the woman of his dreams and decides that he'd rather be with her. With their remake, the Farrellys decided to cunningly turn the tables, adding an underlying message to their work.

"We were actually offered it five years ago, and we instinctively passed," Peter notes. "We didn't want to remake a classic. Then this writer, Leslie Dixon, came to us and had the idea to flip it around. In this version, he marries the fantastically beautiful woman upfront, goes on his honeymoon, and realizes that looks



aren't enough. And then he meets a girl who's more grounded and falls in love with her. So we completely rewrote it and made it our own."

When choosing their leading man, the Farrellys knew exactly who would fit the job. It's difficult to imagine now, but at the time *There's Something About Mary* was released, few people knew who Ben Stiller was. Prior to that breakout role, he had jumped between smaller supporting roles, along with hosting a short-lived, underappreciated TV series.

"Ben, since we did *Mary*, has become a conglomerate," Peter explains. "He's perfect for this because it's about a guy who goes on his honeymoon and falls for another woman. If you don't like

the guy who does this, the movie is going to suffer. And people really like Ben."

Along with the return of their leading man, the Farrellys have also made a leap back to the R-rated format after directing several tamer films in the PG-13 arena. Their parent-friendly fare, such as *Shallow Hal* and *The Ringer*, brought their own controversies due to their presentation of people with disabilities. But the Farrellys defend their portrayal of those with handicaps as a crucial look in the mirror for a society with pre-existing prejudices.

"We noticed when we started making movies that there were never any disabled people in the movies," Peter explains in a serious tone. "We

have friends with disabilities, so we started putting them in. We wanted them to be like everyone else. It allows us to break stereotypes. Of all the movies we've done, I'm proudest of *The Ringer*. If people see the first ten minutes, they're very uncomfortable watching it because we used people with actual intellectual disabilities, and most people aren't around them much. By the end, they're like, 'God, I wish I had friends like that.'"

After several years of toning it down and making more socially responsible, heartfelt movies, the brothers were eager to get back to their cruder origins, and just in time: R-rated comedies are now the metaphorical soup of the day, pulling in millions in revenue.

"I think the R-rated comedy is going to be here for a while," Bobby Farrelly states.

Indeed, things have changed since Cameron Diaz's hair gel scene stunned the cinema-going public. But the Farrellys insist they still have the vigor to compete in the mainstream market, while continuing to push the boundaries of risqué.

"I think the thing that's going to separate this from the others is that there's a lot of sexual innuendo and outright nudity in this," Peter notes enthusiastically. "The one thing I noticed about *Knocked Up*—which, by the way, I loved—was that you didn't even see her breast. They sleep together and she's still got her top on. I'm like, 'What's going on here? That's insane.'"



The Kingdom lacks characters

filmreview

The Kingdom

Now Playing

Directed by Peter Berg

Starring Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Gerner, Chris Cooper, Jason Bateman, Ashrai Barhoum, and Jeremy Pinen

SIMON YACKULIC

Arts & Entertainment Writer

From the first thunderous rifle blasts and vehicle-shredding explosions to swords drawn and screams of "Allahu akbar," *The Kingdom* draws its audience into the midst of a deeply-rooted conflict.

The film opens with a strong and surprisingly informative historical sequence of the events surrounding the plot. This montage provides significant background on the political history of Saudi Arabia since the authoritarian religious monarchy's beginning in 1902.

Don't expect to have to think too much, though: *The Kingdom* entails

graphic and hard-hitting action scenes that parallel the current War on Terror, both in image and story. The stunning visuals—filmed in the United Arab Emirates, right next door to Saudi Arabia itself—serve as the backdrop to hardcore, *CounterStrike*-style terrorist-nailing action and contrast the poor attention given to the characters' backstories. While some moralizing develops around provoking one-liners like "We are going to kill them all," numerous opportunities to further the plot from the simple shooter the movie becomes are often missed.

The plot begins with a vicious and cold-blooded terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia on unarmed American civilians and their children. With an FBI agent among the scattered, charred corpses, the Bureau smells blood and, after a little diplomatic arm-twisting, sends four agents (Foxx, Garner, Cooper, and Bateman) to the desert kingdom to find the terrorists and bring them to justice. Multiple lulls in the plot don't serve to impair the developing trust and respect forming between the agents and a few of the Saudi investigators.

For character back story, it's made known that a few of the agents have sons and want to kill terrorists. It wouldn't be too hard to get past this into a slightly more thought-out history, but the film chooses instead to stick to its guns—literally. Almost immediately after briefing the visual audience on Saudi Arabia, the action starts and, save a few necessary breathers, continues strong through the rest of the movie as the body-count multiplies.

At times, *The Kingdom* was a heavily manipulative movie—it was reported that at many screenings, audience members were cheering when terrorists were taken down. The screening at South Edmonton Common was more subdued however, with the most noticeable audience reaction coming after the FBI team's funny guy (Bateman) irritably informed an Arabic host "It's Leavitt, not Le Vit; I'm not a god damned French Canadian." Apparently we're more patriotic than we let on.

Ultimately, *The Kingdom* is a well-produced, solid action-thriller that just lacks some much needed character development to be a crowning achievement.