



## Star power doesn't redeem *Rendition*

### filmreview

#### Rendition

Now Playing

Directed by Gavin Hood

Starring Jake Gyllenhaal, Reese Witherspoon, Omar Metwally, and Igal Naor

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Arts & Entertainment Writer

The title and trailers for *Rendition* are misleading. They present a film about a terror suspect detained without judicial involvement, while the prisoner's American wife is left frantic for answers. But this particular plot may have been the least exceptional part of the film. *Rendition* follows several related storylines at once, exploring multiple themes raised by Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East to varying degrees of success.

Director Gavin Hood, who impressed audiences with the Oscar-winning *Tsotsi* in 2005, attempts to drive at this multifaceted issue but just gets caught up with unnecessary sentimentality. *Rendition* is successful in humanizing the face of Islamic fundamentalism with the passionate interplay of the Egyptians, while the face of American fundamentalism is subsequently reduced to a cartoon of

stock characters.

Extraordinary rendition is one of the United States' most controversial security policies: it grants government agencies the right to kidnap terror suspects and deport them to foreign prisons where torture is sometimes used to extract answers. Anwar El-Ibrahim (Omar Metwally) is a chemical engineer with an American green card whose suspected involvement in an Egyptian suicide bombing gets him deported to an Egyptian detention centre.

He's tortured for information under the supervision of Abassi Fawal (Igal Naor), an Egyptian security officer, and Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhaal), an American working for the CIA. Anwar's innocence becomes clear early in the film, but the torture continues on orders from the US. Gyllenhaal plays the typical conflicted Hollywood hero who must stand up against authority in order to do the right thing. Naor's character Fawal is, thankfully, more complex: he's militant man, seeking to weed Egypt of terrorism that Naor puts heart and a little humour into portraying, painting a realistic picture of a jaded man, a father, and a husband.

A tragic Egyptian love story contrasts the torturous destruction of Anwar's humanity. A romance blossoms between Abassi's daughter Fatima (Zineb Oukach) and a young man named Khalid (Moa Khouas). Fatima

and Khalid are perhaps the most well-rounded characters of the movie: Fatima strives to define herself as a young, independent woman, rebelling against her militant father, while Khalid is a troubled youth who rides a motorcycle and practices calligraphy.

Back at home in the US, Anwar's wife (Reese Witherspoon) wades through red tape to find her husband. Regrettably, Witherspoon plays a rather inconsistent character: she's a pregnant, all-American soccer mom; she waddles around and complains how tired she is but still maintains energy to scream at higher government officials and play soccer with her son. However, her so-weak-I'm-strong act quickly wears very thin and adds nothing to the film.

Meryl Streep also plays a small role, but one that barely flexes her acting muscles: she's a stone-cold CIA official in Washington who orders the continuation of Anwar's torture, but the ice never melts, and her role remains static.

For all the star power that *Rendition* offers, one would expect a more unified and focused film. The performances of the Egyptian actors far outshine those of the Americans, whose characters fail to fully engage the audience and suspend the viewer's belief. Had Hood portrayed a more objective and ambiguous outlook in his film, the expressive, interlocking elements of the story could have been fully realized.

### culturaobscura

#### Vulva Original

By Viveros Special Products

CONAL PIERSE  
Opinion Editor

When I first heard of Vulva Original, I have to admit that I thought it must have been some form of well-designed hoax. Call me naïve, but I simply don't see a fragrance that smells like the back room of a strip club as having that large of a market. But upon hearing that this was a German product, my thoughts were "of course"—and, almost instantly, I began to see it as credible.

I sent an email to their PR department, requesting a sample of the "precious organic substance" to review for our humble paper, figuring "what's the worst that can happen?" Well, the answer is that I now have a vial of freshly milked vaginal juice sitting on my desk that I treat like anthrax.

Despite the sleek black packaging, there's nothing classy about this product. There's no way to play off *eau de twat* as a legitimate purchase or as a joke product; no, there's a certain piece of yourself that dies the instant



MIKE OTTO

you come into possession of this vial of yellow-tinged liquid.

However, despite all this, the worst part about Vulva is that it doesn't smell anything like its namesake, but rather has a smell that ranges somewhere between hamster cage and musty cigar. Granted, I've never smelt a German vagina, but I would assume that they don't reek like the habitat of a small mammal with a nicotine addiction.

At first, I assumed that I was simply using the product wrong, this being my first time using a scented masturbatory aid. However, after rereading the instructions multiple times, I realized that it was their quality control personnel who

fucked up, not me.

Despite the press kit assuring me multiple times that this product can intensify my erotic fantasies, my experience was of the flaccid variety. There's simply no way that I could conceivably smell this fragrance and claim to be having good time, let alone an erotic one.

Sadly for me, Vulva was a product best dreamt about but never possessed, as the reality fell incredibly short, much like discovering the truth about Santa Claus. Only instead of still having presents to make things better, all I was left with was a hand coated in hamster piss.

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