

‘A Million Ways to Die in the West’ Goes in All Directions

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 29, 2014 - 4:51pm

- [A Million Ways to Die in the West](#) [2]
- [Amanda Seyfried](#) [3]
- [American Dad](#) [4]
- [Arizona](#) [5]
- [Charlize Theron](#) [6]
- [Family Guy](#) [7]
- [Giovanni Ribisi](#) [8]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [9]
- [Horses](#) [10]
- [Liam Neeson](#) [11]
- [Movie Review](#) [12]
- [Neil Patrick Harris](#) [13]
- [Old West](#) [14]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [15]
- [Sarah Silverman](#) [16]
- [Seth MacFarlane](#) [17]
- [Universal Pictures](#) [18]



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Two observations regarding Seth MacFarlane: one, he is a hilarious writer and voiceover talent. Two, he isn’t as good as a comic leading man, on screen and in live action. Those two elements clash brightly in the overlong but funny “A Million Ways to Die in the West.”

A film that can make you laugh – and there are a number of good guffaws in this epic – are rare and should be celebrated. But in the midst of the party for “A Million Ways...” there is a feeling that someone has dumped a poo in the punchbowl, which is the type of joke that MacFarlane loves in this film. All the MacFarlane characteristics, known throughout his years within his notable animated series “Family Guy” and “American Dad,” are in this send-up, but the “R” rating also gives McFarlane a license for overkill. And why does this film have a typical Western plot? Did Mel Brooks have to do that for “Blazing Saddles”? It’s a mishmash, but movie fans can mine some comedy gold out of it.

Albert (MacFarlane) is a sheep farmer on the wild western plains of 1882 territory of Arizona. He hates his existence, with the only entertainment being a roughneck town in which there are “a millions ways to die.” His best friend Edward (Giovanni Ribisi) has his own problems, his girlfriend Ruth (Sarah Silverman) – one of the town’s most prominent prostitutes – won’t sleep with him because they are Christian.



Best Pals Edward (Giovanni Ribisi) and Albert (Seth MacFarlane) in ‘A Million Ways to Die in the West’

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Albert’s life starts spinning away as his girlfriend Louise (Amanda Seyfried) breaks up with him, preferring the a man named Foy (Neil Patrick Harris), who owns the local “Mustachery.” When a mysterious stranger named Anna (Charlize Theron) comes to town, she precedes one of the meanest outlaws in the land, Clinch Leatherwood (Liam Neeson). Meanwhile, Albert keeps trying to survive the one million death scenarios.

No matter how hard he tries, and how many Oscar stages he puts himself upon, MacFarlane needs to stay behind the voiceover mic. His character of Albert, although sincere and funny, doesn’t come across as warm or inviting. There is an argument that we simply don’t care about him, which makes for a long ride through the story. And at the end, there may be a suspicion that little Seth always dreamed about being a cowboy, that’s how much of a western plot gets thrown in – along with lots of unnecessary scenery and horse riding.

There was no need to manufacture a plot that would be at home in a Roy Rogers movie – the sending-up of a western film, especially with the theme of death, was plenty to drive it home. The plot makes the film a bit overlong, and throws off the pacing of the comedy. To be fair, this is a minor complaint because the film does have some great laughs, but it seeks to derail the enjoyment.

And there is much to enjoy. The all-star cast is having a ball, for example. Harris does a hilarious comic turn as Foy, Neeson has a great time as the villain and Theron shows off some skill as a funny lady. Only Silverman, Ribisi and Seyfried get the fuzzy end of the lollipop – they’re all comic props that have been seen before – but what the hey, they probably had a good time as well.



Neil Patrick Harris, Amanda Seyfried (left), Charlize Theron and Seth MacFarlane in ‘A Million Ways to Die in the West’

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

I’ve always loved MacFarlane’s song-and-dance obsession, and here he uses it to high comic effect in “The Mustache Song” and its attached choreography. The death sequences are also very creative, and legitimate. I’d like to see McFarlane take on a “PG-13”-level laugh fest (like his animated TV show levels) because he relies a bit too much on poo-poo humor, extreme swearing and tired sex jokes (hello, “There’s Something About Mary”), like he did in last year’s “Ted.” But in the end S-Mac is a dedicated comedic force, the film is funny, and maybe for his next film he can just write and direct it.

There is a lot to make fun of in the Old West, and MacFarlane does include a dig at the Manifest Destiny that our United States history likes to sweep under the rug. Ask any Native American about that one, as you’re pulling a slot handle at an Indian Casino or sleeping under a smallpox-infected blanket.

“A Million Ways to Die in the West” opens everywhere on May 30th. Featuring Seth MacFarlane, Charlize Theron, Amanda Seyfried, Giovanni Ribisi, Liam Neeson, Sarah Silverman and Neil Patrick Harris. Written by Seth MacFarlane, Alec Sukin and Wellesley Wild. Directed by Seth MacFarlane. Rated “R”



[19]

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