

Film Review



'London Has Fallen,' a ludicrous sequel on steroids

London Has Fallen" never pretends to be anything it's not. The sequel to Antoine Fuqua's big, dumb and kind of fun "Olympus Has Fallen," is bigger, dumber, jaw-droppingly shameless and also kind of a riot. It is just so spectacularly cliched and over-the-top that all you can do is laugh.

The craziest thing is how they convinced everyone to reprise their roles. A dare? Fond memories? Or perhaps the \$161 million worldwide box office receipts didn't hurt either. In any event, Aaron Eckhart is back as U.S. President Benjamin Asher, Angela Bassett as Lynne the Secret Service Director, Morgan Freeman as the Vice President and, of course, Gerard Butler as Secret Service Agent Mike Banning - the guy who saved the country from an improbably big assault on the White House just three years ago.

The only one missing is director Antoine Fuqua and you feel it. He's been replaced with Swedish director Babak Najafi in his English-language debut. Fuqua might not have been at his best with "Olympus Has Fallen" but he's still a skilled director. "London Has Fallen" is a lot more cartoon.

This time, the president, Mike and Lynn head off to London for the funeral of the British Prime Minister where 40 other heads of state are expected. And, as is want for the unluckiest administration in history, there's a large-scale, hyper-coordinated attack in the moments before

the funeral as the terrorists pick off world leaders in various comical locations around the city. The French PM is on a luxury motor boat with champagne, the Japanese PM is stuck in traffic on a bridge, and the older Italian PM is up on the rooftop of Westminster Abbey with his young girlfriend because "you only turn 30 once."

Action movie based on action movies

One of the only ones to get out alive is the US president, and he and Mike begin an unbelievable run around the city to try to find safety. All that's missing was a montage of them trying on some civilian clothes so that they aren't running around the desolate streets in their "hey, I'm the president and his protector three-piece navy suits." That, sadly, does not happen.

Anyone who saw the first one knows that this is not an action movie that's based in any sort of reality. It's an action movie based on other action movies. The lines are big, the jokes are dumb, the through-the-temple shots and ensuing blood splatter gratuitous, the logic infuriating, and the gunfire relentless. At one point, when Mike and the President are in relative safety, Mike confirms to a terrorist via intercom that, yes, he is the one with the president.

Mike also might be a murderous sociopath. When President Ben asks what he's made of, he says "bourbon and bad decisions." He also

prefers the close contact knife kill to simple gun shots and makes jokes like "I knew you'd come out of the closet sometime" when the president emerges to save him from a terrorist.

The terrorists, by the way, are led by a powerful international arms dealer (Alon Moni Aboutboul) who is out for vengeance after a drone strike targeting him ended up killing his daughter at her wedding. For such an epic and comprehensive operation, his goals are fuzzy at best. It's a wonder how he was able to turn all those British police and royal guards into his own personal army with a vague "change the world" message.

But that's too much thinking for a movie that is ultimately just mindless bluster. It remains so-bad-its-good fun, too, until the final third which devolves into some troubling Middle Eastern stereotypes and rah-rah American patriotic posturing as contrast. This sort of movie was made for television viewing. You could tune in or out at any moment and really not miss anything. Or just have a drink beforehand and bring your rowdiest friends to the theater. "London Has Fallen," a Gramercy Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "strong violence and language throughout." Running time: 99 minutes. One and a half stars out of four. - AP

Casting Saldana as Simone inflames ideas of race, beauty

If there was any doubt about how Nina Simone's family and fans feel about the upcoming biopic starring Zoe Saldana, recent social media posts make it clear they are not pleased. A fresh round of criticism for the film erupted after the trailer and poster for "Nina" were unveiled Wednesday. Saldana posted a quote from the singer and civil rights activist on Twitter, and Simone's estate responded with: "Cool story but please take Nina's name out your mouth. For the rest of your life." Simone's daughter and others have decried the choice to cast a light-skinned actress as the African-American activist since Saldana took the part in 2012. Her skin was apparently darkened for the role, and she wears a prosthetic nose.

At the time, Simone's daughter, Simone Kelly, said: "Appearance-wise this is not the best choice." "My mother was raised at a time when she was told her nose was too wide, her skin was too dark," Kelly told the New York Times in a 2012 interview.

Simone's dark complexion and traditionally African features were central to her identity and concept of black beauty, so casting someone with Saldana's more ethnically ambiguous appearance is galling, said Miriam J Petty, assistant professor in the African-American Studies department at Northwestern University.

Depth of ignorance

"It's disrespectful and demonstrates the depth of the ignorance of the person making the film of the very subject of the film," she said. The Simone estate tweeted Wednesday: "Hopefully people begin to understand this is painful. Gut-wrenching, heartbreaking, nauseating, soul-crushing." The estate is urging fans to hold listening parties on the film's release date rather than watching "Nina."

Petty, also a devoted Simone fan, also encourages fans to stay away. "I think it's important not to support this film financially, because the problem with biopics is they become the last word," she said. "Whatever can be done to discredit this film as not the definitive one, by virtue of the philosophical problem, the very blatant philo-

sophical problem of this casting." The singer's estate cooperated with producers of the Netflix documentary "What Happened, Miss Simone?" which was nominated for an Oscar this year.

Robert L Johnson, founder and chairman of the studio releasing "Nina," describes Saldana's performance as "an exceptional and mesmerizing tribute." "She gave her heart and soul to the role and displayed her extraordinary talent," he said in a statement Thursday. "The most important thing is that creativity or quality of performance should never be judged on the basis of color, or ethnicity, or physical likeness." Asks Petty: "Then why put Zoe Saldana in brown-face makeup?"

Representatives for Saldana and the Simone estate did not respond to requests for comment Thursday from The Associated Press. RLJ Entertainment will release "Nina" in theaters, digital HD and video on demand on April 22. - AP



Zoe Saldana attends the Los Angeles Premiere of "Infinitely Polar Bear" held at Regal Cinemas L.A. LIVE in Los Angeles. — AP photos



In this June 27, 1985 file photo, singer Nina Simone performs at Avery Fisher Hall.