

The big screen

'Mean Girls' full of queer jokes and a gay character

by Steve Warren

"Mean Girls" isn't as mean as classics of the genre, such as "Heathers" and "Election," but it has enough of an edge to let Lindsay Lohan know she's not in "Freaky Friday" or "Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen" anymore. In other words, she's escaped from Disney!

She's escaped from Disney and landed in the middle of "Saturday Night Live," surrounded by Tina Fey (who wrote the script), Tim Meadows, Ana Gasteyer and Amy Poehler. Meadows comes off best of the lot, playing a Cosbysque principal.

Cady Heron (Lohan) has been home-schooled all her life, living in Africa with her parents (Gasteyer, Neil Flynn). Now she's 16 and they've moved to the Chicago area, and Cady has to go to a real school.

As naïve about the social structure as pop culture, she's quickly adopted by a pair of outsiders: Damian (Daniel Franzese), who is "almost too gay to function," and Janis Ian (Lizzy Caplan), a punkette who is rumored to be a lesbian. They fill her in on all the cliques (including the now standard scene about who sits where in the lunchroom), especially the "Plastics," three self-appointed divas (marked down from the "Six Chicks" of last week's "13 Going on 30").

The queen bee of the Plastics, Regina George (Rachel McAdams) gives Cady a probationary invitation to the inner circle until she decides she can join her other disciples, Gretchen (Lacey Chabert) and Karen (Amanda Seyfried). Janis wants to use Cady as a mole to help her get revenge on Regina for starting that lesbian rumor in middle school.



(Left to right) Rachel McAdams, Lacey Chabert and Amanda Seyfried in 'Mean Girls.'

Cady happens to excel in math because "it's the same in every country." She's invited to join the Mathletes who compete against other schools because "we can get twice the funding if we have a girl." She's encouraged by math teacher Ms. Norbury (Fey), who says, "I would love to have a girl on the team so the team — could meet a girl"; but her friends — both sets — warn Cady this would be "social suicide."

Also of interest in math class is the guy who sits in front of Cady, Aaron Samuels (Jonathan Bennett). Trouble is, he's Regina's ex, and "ex-boyfriends are off limits to friends." Cady still makes sporadic efforts to get to know him, including letting her grades slip so she can ask him for tutoring. (Somehow she fails to bring them back up when the masquerade is no longer necessary.)

Regina, whose mother (Poehler) is "not a regular mom. I'm a cool mom," keeps a "Burn Book" in her room in which she disses all her classmates and some of the faculty.

There's a lot of hilarious stuff in "Mean Girls" but the film isn't entirely satisfying. True to her SNL roots Fey works in bursts of eight minutes or less to flesh out a script in which events appear to be dictated by a strict outline.

There are more queer jokes than in most high school comedies but while the gay boy gets a lot of good laughs he never comes close to getting a boyfriend. Anyone who ever felt like "the only one" will relate to him. Two girls kiss in the background at a party but they're important enough to be listed in the credits.

Unlike the characters it's named for, "Mean Girls" is a little bit too nice. But who would go to see a movie called "Nice Girls"?

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