“Horrible Bosses”—Good Guys Gone Bad

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LEIPZIG, Germany: Director Seth Gordon (“Freakonomics”, “Four Christmases”) brings another example to Hollywood’s long line of freaky dentists, with Jennifer Aniston playing a sex maniac who harasses her male assistant and takes advantage of her unconscious patients. “Horrible Bosses” by New Line Cinema also challenges common film narratives.

“Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works”—epitomized Gordon Gekko, the “American Dream” of the 1980s in the legendary line of “Wall Street.” In postcrisis Hollywood cinema, this dream has been replaced by widespread economic instability, while the driving hunger for ‘more’ has been reduced to the bare struggle for food and recognition.

Aniston’s character, who is barely on-screen, is not the only obnoxious boss in this movie. There is company owner Bob Pellit (Colin Farrell), for example, who is having cocaine-powdered sex parties, and Dave Harken (Kevin Spacey), all-mighty president of a brokerage firm, who controls his employees with the dangling carrot of promotion.

“Horrible Bosses” has a twisted plot of three white-collar workers—Nick Hendricks (Jason Bateman), Kurt Buckman (Jason Sudeikis) and Dale Arbus (Charlie Day)—who are hindered in their pursuit of happiness by this troika of sexist, sadist, and soulless superiors. In a system where they enjoy no protection, the only solution for these workers is to physically liberate themselves from their oppressors for the greater, righteous, and sustainable good. Their liberation struggle then turns to drastic measures. This is when a ‘murder consultant’ (played by the fabulous Jamie Foxx) appears on the scene.

The movie touches a nerve here, and tries to challenge boundaries there—most notably through its strong language—but it does not pursue this at its critical moments. While the beginning is somewhat predictable, it is the twists and turns that, in the latter part of the film, dominate the events.

At times, the portrayal of the characters as black and white makes it difficult to identify with them. However, Gordon and writer Michael Markowitz have gathered a first-class cast, which makes the movie work for the audience most of the time.

Inspired by some employees’ real-life experiences, akin to “The Devil wears Prada” and “The Nanny Diaries,” “Horrible Bosses” follows a recent Hollywood trend of portraying bosses as the enemy. It also seeks to challenge the system. Notably, its anti-Darwinist ending, mocking Gekko’s visionaries leaves one wanting more.

“Horrible Bosses” is out in the theaters throughout the Asia-Pacific region.