

## Movie Review: 'I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry'

by David\_Elliott

Maybe it is a sign of health (but not much) that, nearly six years after the 9/11 disaster, New York firemen are not treated as saints in a Hollywood movie.

'I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU CHUCK AND LARRY' - Jessica Biel advises Adam Sandler and Kevin James on their legal rights as a domestic couple in the comedy 'I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry.' CNS Photo courtesy of Tracy Bennett. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Instead, "I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry" says they're a bunch of lovable buffoons, prone to silly gags during fires, and suddenly switching from glandular homophobia to get-along PC values.

This Adam Sandler comedy grabs its material every which way. So frantically hetero that he has a virtual harem of bimbo dollies, fireman Chuck (Sandler) consents to pretend being gay with fire buddy Larry (Kevin

James). He owes Larry a big favor, and widower Larry needs benefits that he will only get by faking a gay marriage - and never mind the entire prior histories of both men.

The writers and director Dennis Dugan conspire to be gutsy in a gutless way. The stars barely dabble in gayness (nothing sexual), but they squirm a great deal and camp a little while always being covered: Larry remains fixated on his dead wife and his adorable kids, while Chuck preens a manly cigar, dukes out a nasty homophobe and has a pro-gay lawyer (Jessica Biel) who lets him fondle her prized breasts because she thinks he's gay.

Not a chance, what with Sandler looking gelded by the mere thought. It's all just buddy love with a twist. When other firemen unite against the two men, they are shamed from their primitivism only by Larry invoking team loyalty. This comes with heaps of gay stereotypes, a mention of AIDS relief, a salute to the NYFD and "the great Mayor Giuliani."

Saying that everyone hits their marks is like saying a sober carpenter can hit nails. James is the endearing chunkie who hates being called fat, but there's also a sight gag about a 500-pound fatso, followed by gas humor. Sandler does his usual foxy, boyish rogue, panting after women while seeming to need mothering and mental diapering.

Richard Chamberlain, who came out of the closet a few years ago, gets to play the deep-voiced head of an official inquiry, and seems impressed when Chuck denounces the word "faggot." Steve Buscemi plays a snoopy weasel ready to spoil any party, gay or straight.

Dan Aykroyd, as station captain, can still do his drill-gun comic spiels reliably. And Ving Rhames is a brave man. Given what happened to him in "Pulp Fiction," coming out as a huge fireman who begins morphing toward Little Richard is adventurous work.

The movie, though, is a swamp of back-issue cliches, invoking and tweaking every gay-bait impulse among viewers, but then laying on warm piety and chuckles. The swish is all squish.

A Universal Pictures release. Director: Dennis Dugan. Writer: Barry Fanaro, Alexander Payne, Jim Taylor, Lew Gallo. Cast: Adam Sandler, Kevin James, Jessica Biel, Dan Aykroyd, Steve Buscemi, Richard Chamberlain, Ving Rhames. Running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes. Rated PG-13. 1 1/2 stars.

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