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**THE SUNDAY TIMES**



## Cannes: a tale of two kingdoms

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**S**acha Baron Cohen was always going to struggle to trump the teeny-weenie green mankini he sported to such memory-searing effect on Cannes' golden sands a few years ago while beating the publicity bongos as/for Borat, writes Matt Mueller.

But being fondled on a yacht as *The Dictator* by an unfortunate supermodel before taking a trip down the Croisette on the back of a camel won't be going down in the annals of the festival's all-time great publicity stunts. As a kick-off to the world's most glamour-soaked cinema showcase, Cohen's activities had the whiff of forgettable meh about them...

There was slightly more enthusiasm for Wes Anderson's opening film *Moonrise Kingdom*, although not much – it too is likely to find itself forgotten by the end of the festival. Watching it was akin to dipping your toes into calm, tepid waters: a pleasant enough experience but one in danger of instigating torpor were it not for an occasional strange, brightly-coloured fish swimming up to nibble your toe.

The film is set in 1965 on an idyllic holiday isle called New Penzance, where unhappy lawyers Frances McDormand and Bill Murray live with three young sons (obsessive listeners of Benjamin Britten's *The Young Person's Guide To The Orchestra*) and their bookish, binocular-wielding daughter Suzy (Kara Hayward), a misunderstood miss who finds in her parents' possession a pamphlet titled 'Coping with the Very Troubled Child'.

Also on the island is Camp Ivanhoe, where chipper scoutmaster Ed Norton waltzes past a series of sight gags to discover that one of his junior Scouts, an owlish orphan named Sam (Jared Gilman), has gone AWOL. Sam and Suzy – penpals it turns out – link up to become outcast runaways, carting necessities like a portable record player and tins of kitten food along an old Indian trail and initiating both a frantic search and puppy love.

It's a vintage-drenched offering with its fair share of charm and enchantment but also one that drifts along in a sea of hazy whimsy and enforced quirk. There are likeable (if overly knowing)

turns from McDormand, Murray, Norton and Bruce Willis as the island cop, not to mention jump-starting, third-act appearances by Harvey Keitel, Tilda Swinton and Jason Schwartzman, and the filmmaker's fans may find themselves in heaven with his epigrammatic verbiage, the toy-town production design and cute incidents between the youthful protagonists, including dancing on the beach to a '60s French pop song. Detractors of his brand of acerbic, rarefied whimsicality, on the other hand, will fail to be won over by this slight child's-eye fantasy.

Apart from the anomalous *Fantastic Mr Fox*, Anderson's imagination has a stuck-in-aspic quality to it these days. The defining cultural moments he achieved with *The Royal Tenenbaums* or *Rushmore* seem more and more unlikely to be repeated.