

# The Great Dictator

**USA (1941)** 125 minutes

**Director:** Charlie Chaplin

**Cast:** Charlie Chaplin (Adenoid Hynkel/Jewish Barber); Paulette Goddard (Hannah)



**Screening 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2027 at Swindon Arts Centre**

## Summary

During World War I a Jewish barber fighting in the army of Tomania effects the valiant rescue of an officer named Schultz, but suffers loss of memory when the plane in which they are flying crashes into a tree. The little soldier is sent to a hospital where he remains for the next 20 years, unaware of the changes that are taking place around him. He does not know, for instance, that Hynkel (his doppelganger) has become Dictator of Tomania, and is ruthlessly persecuting the Jews.

## Reviews

The Great Dictator" is essentially a tragic picture-- or tragi-comic in the classic sense-- and it has strongly bitter overtones. For it is a lacerating fable of the unhappy lot of decent folk in a totalitarian land, of all the hateful oppression which has crushed the humanity out of men's souls. And, especially, it is a withering revelation, through genuinely inspired mimicry, of the tragic weaknesses, the overblown conceit and even the blank insanity of a dictator. Hitler, of course.

*Bosley Crowther (The New York Times-1940)*



Strangely, though, what remains so powerful about the film's satire is its outright silliness. Exaggerating Hitler's animated demagogic style at the microphone into complete absurdity, Chaplin's childish satirical swipes work because of - and not in spite of - their refusal to accept Nazism as anything other than an outrageously bad joke.

*Jamie Russell (BBC/Gloucestershire-2003)*

## Film Facts

- The Great Dictator was Chaplin's first feature with full sound.
- According to biographer Jürgen Trimborn, much of the film was inspired by a screening of Leni Riefenstahl's pro-Hitler documentary, *Triumph of the Will*.
- It was 1941's second biggest hit in the US.

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