

'30 Minutes or Less...?' you wish...



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30 Minutes Or Less

Rating:

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While it is possible to make comedy out of situations that would be harrowing in real life, “30 Minutes or Less” doesn’t pull it off. Maybe Ruben Fleischer’s follow-up to the wonderfully entertaining “Zombieland” would have seemed funnier if this sort of thing hadn’t actually happened to an actual pizza delivery man, but whether you know that story or not, this action comedy isn’t especially exciting or funny. Jesse Eisenberg plays Nick, a stoner who

delivers pizzas for a living, and it isn’t until he has a bomb strapped to his chest that he actually seems to develop some ambition and energy.

This is part of a harebrained scheme by two mentally defective slackers, Dwayne and Travis (Danny McBride and Nick Swardson), who are forcing Nick to rob a bank so they can afford to hire a hitman to kill Dwayne’s father (Fred Ward) before he spends all his lottery winnings. Then they want to open a tanning parlor that’s a front for a brothel. Yes, I’m serious.

The terrified Nick has nowhere to look for help but his ex-best friend, Chet (Aziz Ansari). There’s some posturing about Nick facing up to adulthood (his problems with Chet largely stem from Chet’s getting a teaching career started) but it’s taking itself too seriously given the overall shock comedy tone. None of the characters are particularly likeable. It may not be

possible to root for Dwayne and Travis, but it's equally difficult to actually care whether or not Nick gets blown up in the process.

Eisenberg, entertaining in "Zombieland" and brilliant in "The Social Network," is, unaccountably, playing this straight. That's probably a stab at depth this movie didn't need and actually can't withstand. McBride and Swardson at least don't make that mistake, but their characters are more annoying than funny. Michael Peña manages to some life as a hitman who becomes understandably determined to kill someone involved in this mess. But he's too little too late and besides, I said "some life."

It isn't that "30 Minutes or Less" is an unqualified disaster—it might be more entertaining if it were—it's more a case of mediocrity and near-misses. Nothing's as funny or as exciting as it should be. The whole movie feels as though it were dreamed up and executed by a couple of fairly bright slackers smoking dope in their mother's basement. You have the vague feeling they could have been capable of better had they only applied themselves.

Michael Diliberti's screenplay (the story was co-written by Matthew Sullivan) is absolutely adolescent, which isn't intended as a compliment here. There's an underlying attitude that demonstrating an exhaustive knowledge of absolutely every known colloquial expression for female genitalia and having the main character smoke weed makes the movie cool. Maybe for viewers too young to go to an R-rated comedy without their parents. For everyone else, not so much.

Reportedly, the actors were encouraged to improvise, often a concession on the director's part that the script sucks. That's easy to believe. But it's no excuse for letting the inmates take over the asylum. The movie is competently put together, but it isn't impressive enough to compete with "Fast Five" in the action arena.

There are some funny jokes. They're all in the trailer. "30 Minutes or Less" is only 85 minutes long, which is enough to be a pizza out of Nick's check at the end of the week, but it actually feels longer. 30 minutes or less? You wish.