

DVD Review: Channing Tatum's 'The Son of No One' Bound to Please No One

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on March 1, 2012 - 11:21am

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CHICAGO – With the right role and the right director, Channing Tatum manages to convince me that he is in fact a decent actor. He's delivered enough solid work to illustrate that he's more than just empty eye candy (in other words, he's no Taylor Lautner). So why does Tatum continue to forge collaborations with Dito Montiel, a director who has a knack for making him look like an amateur?

There's nothing remotely compelling or magnetic about Tatum's work in "The Son of No One," a star-studded dud that marks the third directorial effort of Montiel. After his hyper-stylized debut effort, "A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints," and forgettable sports drama, "Fighting," Montiel has hit a new low with this dull and predictable crime drama. The level of misused talent in the ensemble is as staggering as it is depressing.



DVD Rating: **1.5/5.0**

Corrupt cops are a dime a dozen at the multiplex these days, and Montiel's fictionalized version of the Queens 118th precinct is comprised entirely of cackling scumbags. Into this hateful environment enters rookie officer Jonathan (Tatum), who harbors a very dark secret in his troubled past. Why he would choose to work at the same department previously inhabited by one of the only men who knows his secret is utterly inexplicable. As a neglected boy living in the Queensboro Projects, Jonathan killed two men out of self-defense. Since the men were labeled as junkies, Detective Stanford (Al Pacino) confessed that he couldn't care less about either of them. The resulting cover-up would haunt Jonathan into his adult years, but few emotional scars are visible on Tatum's face. He spends the entire picture with the same drab, brooding stare, and delivers much of his dialogue with his head pointed down. Equally tedious is the performance by Tracy Morgan (in a failed attempt at dramatic acting) as Jonathan's childhood friend, whose mental illness has turned him into a weary recluse. Since the script quickly devolves into prolonged flashbacks, child actors Jake Cherry and Brian Gilbert are asked to carry the emotional heft of the picture and they do an admirable job. It's a pity Tatum and Morgan couldn't have taken acting lessons from them.



The Son of No One was released on Blu-ray and DVD on Feb. 21, 2012.

Photo credit: Anchor Bay Entertainment

Even the most superbly crafted portraits of nefarious law officials, such as Oren Moverman's "Rampart," find little new to say about police corruption. All that's left to do is juxtapose familiar characters with potent historical backdrops, such as Los Angeles circa 1999 ("Rampart") and New York circa 2002 ("The Son of No One"). The cops in Montiel's film embrace 9/11 as a reason to justify their own self-righteous lawlessness, and that story element could've easily set the stage for a provocative drama. Instead, Montiel's script relies on instantly obvious clichés. When anonymous letters unearthing the double murder scandal start arriving at the office of a muckraking journalist (Juliette Binoche), Montiel starts building suspense around the identity of the writer, complete with a ridiculous red herring. Viewers who carefully watch the opening title sequence will have no difficulty in correctly identifying the mystery writer long before they're supposed to. But that hardly matters since the one-note characters are nearly impossible to care about anyway.

The repetitive dialogue occasionally sounds like it was delivered in an echo chamber, such as when Jonathan's angry wife (Katie Holmes) veers from screaming, "Look at me! Look at me!" to muttering, "What happened? What happened?" All of the veteran actors appear to be sleepwalking through their roles, with the exception of James Ransone, cast as the hideously corrupt Officer Prudenti, who earns points for being absolutely unbearable (as he should be). You know you're watching a turkey when Pacino fails to age within a span of sixteen years. It's a pity that the actor couldn't have borrowed his makeup crew from "You Don't Know Jack," though it's pretty clear now that Pacino has decided to make an effort for no one apart from HBO.

"The Son of No One" is presented in its 2.35:1 aspect ratio, accompanied by English and Spanish audio tracks and includes six minutes of barely extended scenes that mainly allow for more incoherent ramblings from Spike Lee regular Roger Guenveur Smith as the ill-fated junkie named Hanky. Nothing on the snoozy audio commentary track with Montiel and executive producer/editor Jake Pushinsky is of any interest either, aside from a few moments in which the director reflects on his upbringing in Queens and how it inspired aspects of the script. What's particularly infuriating is Montiel's defense of wasting Binoche in a throwaway role (he wanted a foreign woman that would look out of place in

the projects). I would've loved to hear a commentary track in which casting directors Kerry Barden and Paul Schnee discussed how they managed to attach so many A-list actors to D-list material. Too much of Montiel and Pushinsky's banter is purely of the jokey observational variety. "Hope this isn't as boring as it sounds," quips Montiel. It sure is.

'The Son of No One' is released by Anchor Bay Entertainment and stars Channing Tatum, Ray Liotta, Jake Cherry, James Ransone, Brian Gilbert, Al Pacino, Katie Holmes, Juliette Binoche and Tracy Morgan. It was written and directed by Dito Montiel. It was released on Feb. 21, 2012. It is rated R.



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