

Blu-ray Review: Whimsically Low-Key ‘Seeking a Friend for the End of the World’

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- [Blu-ray Review](#) [2]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [3]
- [Keira Knightly](#) [4]
- [Lorene Scafaria](#) [5]
- [Matt Fagerholm](#) [6]
- [Melancholia](#) [7]
- [Patton Oswalt](#) [8]
- [Seeking a Friend for the End of the World](#) [9]
- [Steve Carell](#) [10]
- [Universal Studios Home Entertainment](#) [11]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [12]

CHICAGO – Nothing causes would-be lovers to fall into one another’s arms quite like a good, old-fashioned apocalypse. The nerve one lacks to pursue a romantic obsession tends to reemerge when faced with impending extinction. While Abel Ferrara’s “4:44 Last Day on Earth” and David Mackenzie’s “Perfect Sense” took a brooding look at last-minute romance, director Lorene Scafaria heads in quite a different direction.

Her film, “Seeking a Friend for the End of the World,” is a whimsical road movie not unlike her script for the cuddly teen comedy, “Nick and Norah’s Infinite Playlist.” She views the apocalypse not as a horrific tragedy but as a metaphor for mankind’s impending mortality and how it can be used as a motivational tool to make every second count. It wasn’t until apartment dweller Dodge (Steve Carell) heard the news of Earth’s demise (scheduled to occur in three weeks time, courtesy of a pesky asteroid) that he realized a Manic Pixie Dream Girl was living across the hall all along.



Blu-ray Rating: **3.0/5.0**

This two-dimensional archetype, so brilliantly critiqued by screenwriter/actress Zoe Kazan in the criminally overlooked, “Ruby Sparks,” is brought to exuberant comic life by Keira Knightly, whose loopy, childlike personality is so beguiling that it nearly makes her inexplicable attraction to the gentle yet gloomy Dodge credible. I can’t quite say that Carell and Knightly have convincing chemistry, but they are both a joy to watch on their own terms. In his quieter moments, particularly when confronted by his long-forgotten father, Carell proves to be as gifted a dramatic actor as he is a comedian. His character isn’t simply morose—he’s beaten down by a lifetime of failed relationships and broken trust. When he stumbles upon a love letter from an old flame, Dodge decides to pursue her while promising to help the exceedingly manic Penny (Knightly) reconnect with her family. Throughout their journey, they have alternately amusing and unsettling encounters with an array of colorful characters, including a mysterious trucker (William Petersen), an obnoxious ex-boyfriend (Adam Brody) and (in one of the film’s funniest vignettes), the staff of a psychotically genial restaurant chain known as “Friendsy’s.” Many of these characters are played by top-drawer comics, many of whom are granted no more than a few lines of dialogue (Patton Oswalt’s screen time was viewed nearly in its entirety in the film’s trailer). The star-studded ensemble may give audiences the false impression that Scafaria is aiming for riotous farce rather than low-key whimsy.



Seeking a Friend for the End of the World was released on Blu-ray and DVD on October 23rd, 2012.

Photo credit: Universal Studios Home Entertainment

One of the finest performances is delivered by Mark Moses (of "Mad Men" fame) as an anchorman who heroically continues to report the news with a calm composure even as chaos engulfs the streets. Though Scafaria's film has the misfortune of being upstaged by a slew of similar pictures with nearly identical final acts, it has a sweetness that I found rather irresistible. Beneath its deadpan antics is a touching portrait of a life awakening just as the planet has reached its curtain call. It's a story that has been told before, but rarely with such rejuvenating charm.

"Seeking a Friend for the End of the World" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Spanish audio tracks and is available in a combo pack featuring Blu-ray, DVD, UltraViolet and digital copies of the film. Extras include two forgettable featurettes and a gag reel that provides more screen time for the largely wasted ensemble, including the wonderful Amy Schumer, who recently achieved fame on the Comedy Central roasts of Charlie Sheen and Roseanne. She delivers an uproarious ad-lib at the very end of the gag reel that cracks up her co-stars and will hopefully garner the attention of Hollywood producers (Judd Apatow, are you listening?). Yet the vast majority of laughs contained on this disc are saved for the audio commentary track where Scafaria is joined by her mother, Gail, producer Joy Gorman, Adam Brody and most importantly, Patton Oswalt, who should basically be invited to appear on every audio commentary track, regardless of whether he appears in the actual film for more than two seconds. His riffs are laugh-out-loud hysterical, such as when he compares himself to Lou Costello or when he makes the spot-on observation that Scafaria's film has the exact same message as Lars von Trier's 2011 masterpiece, "Melancholia": "the chemically depressed are best prepared for the world's end."

'Seeking a Friend for the End of the World' is released by Universal Studios Home Entertainment and stars Steve Carell, Keira Knightley, Connie Britton, Rob Corddry, Derek Luke, Melanie Lynskey, William Peterson, Adam Brody, Patton Oswalt and Mark Moses. It was written and directed by Lorene Scafaria. It was released on October 23rd, 2012. It is rated R.

By [MATT FAGERHOLM](#) [14]
Staff Writer
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com)



[13]

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- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patton-oswalt>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/seeking-a-friend-for-the-end-of-the-world>
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