

Bradley Cooper's 'Limitless' Unlocks 100% of Hollywood's Ridiculousness

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- [Abbie Cornish](#) [2]
- [Adam Fendelman](#) [3]
- [Alan Glynn](#) [4]
- [Andrew Howard](#) [5]
- [Anna Friel](#) [6]
- [Bradley Cooper](#) [7]
- [Darren Goldstein](#) [8]
- [Johnny Whitworth](#) [9]
- [Leslie Dixon](#) [10]
- [Limitless](#) [11]
- [Movie Review](#) [12]
- [Ned Eisenberg](#) [13]
- [Neil Burger](#) [14]
- [Robert De Niro](#) [15]
- [Robert John Burke](#) [16]
- [Tomas Arana](#) [17]
- [Virgin Produced](#) [18]



Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – If you're not easily susceptible to vertigo and can survive the intro cut scene, "Limitless" proceeds to treat you to one part thrill ride and one part exercise in ridiculousness. While we often go to the movies to escape, "Limitless" manipulatively exploits our deepest and darkest desires for wealth, power and Google-like global conquests.

The film's frustrations start and end with its story, which was written for the screen by Leslie Dixon based on the novel by Alan Glynn. Dixon, who has come a long way from "Mrs. Doubtfire" with this immediate-gratification film that goes out one ear just as fast as it enters the other, bases her premise on an experimental, non-FDA-approved drug with no street name.



Bradley Cooper in "Limitless".

Image credit: John Baer, Dark Fields Production

Predictable with every try at a twist or turn, even if your brain got extracted from your head you'd still be able to channel from it the obviousness of exactly how this film's going to go down. *Mysterious pill with shadowy origins yields super power that comes at great cost and high-octane peril.* While so many films have already taken us down that rabbit hole, "Limitless" will be remembered for forgetting to make us care we've fallen down it the second we leave the theater.

Once you get past what might for a few minutes be wildly entertaining to become that intelligent, charismatic, rich and powerful, "Limitless" leaves you feeling limited. Even if you're left craving to "have what he's having," that story line is much better left a subplot in films like "When Harry Met Sally" rather than its entire underlying theme.

Director Neil Burger, who's only done four films in nine years, appears to be working under the snoozed influence of his on hallucinogenic drug. With "Limitless," he's subpar at best when compared to his mastery with the 2006 Edward Norton film "The Illusionist". While Robert De Niro can always be counted on for solid screen time, here he's weakly scripted as an omnipotent man you're supposed to fear but end up just wondering if he's impotent.



Abbie Cornish (left) and Bradley Cooper in "Limitless".
Image credit: Myles Aronowitz, Dark Fields Production

Mad props, though, go to this film's hair, makeup and wardrobe departments for their ability to transform the brightly blue-eyed Bradley Cooper into a bum and then a beefcake. On the other hand, Abbie Cornish – who otherwise is an understandable addition to the film as its traditionally pretty leading lady – is forced into an ice skate-slashing scene that pushes the film's ridiculousness over the edge into the ever-dreaded realm of mockery.

While the film follows Cooper's drug-induced rise from a failing writer to fame and fortune, it's insulting to the common sense. You are to believe that one translucent and enigmatic pill every day lets you learn Chinese in a few hours and comprehend the algorithmic mysteries of the stock market all while magically accessing Jason Bourne's whoopass skills just because you remember watching a home Bruce Lee movie from when you're younger.



Robert De Niro in "Limitless".

Image credit: John Baer, Dark Fields Production

The film's transformation from using only 20 percent of your brain to unlocking – within seconds of popping this pill down the fun hatch – the entirety of the rest tries entirely too hard to make its pointless point. While the supernatural effects only last a day, the immediacy of the transformation has to be signified visually through brighter and higher-contrast lighting.

The only comedy in the film comes from Virgin Produced – yes, a new film and TV production company from the Virgin Group – simply because the company says the following about itself: "Virgin Produced very simply has balls and we're not afraid to show them. In fact, we're gonna go ahead and apologize ahead of time." "Limitless" is the first major film from Virgin Produced, which at least does apologize in advance for its first attempt at a real film.

Because we all go to the movies for different reasons, it's important to remember we're not always wanting a richly crafted story, emotionally evocative characters and an enduring message we can actually use more than six seconds after we waddle with crossed legs to the bathroom. Sometimes we don't want to be forced into an intellectually and emotionally demanding film like "Schindler's List," and instead, we blindly and numbly just want to have fun.



Bradley Cooper in "Limitless".

Image credit: Relativity Media

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For those thrill seekers, "Limitless" is a transient tonic that can taste like a savory filet mignon that lasts for just one bite. Its visual effects and relatively hurried pacing successfully move things along fast enough that at times you don't care that you don't care.

But after you're high in this film's momentary Lalaland of disillusionment, be prepared for the bad trip of coming down to the disappointment of yet another fleeting popcorn film.

"Limitless" stars Bradley Cooper, Robert De Niro, Abbie Cornish, Andrew Howard, Anna Friel, Johnny Whitworth, Tomas Arana, Robert John Burke, Darren Goldstein, Ned Eisenberg, T.V. Carpio, Richard Bekins, Patricia Kalember, Cindy Katz and Brian Anthony Wilson from director Neil Burger and writer Leslie Dixon based on the novel by Alan Glynn. The film, which has a running time of 105 minutes and opened on March 18, 2011, is rated "PG-13" for thematic material involving a drug, violence including disturbing images, sexuality and language.



[19]

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- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/leslie-dixon>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/limitless>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/ned-eisenberg>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/neil-burger>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/robert-de-niro>
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