

Nothing Nice to Say About Eddie Murphy's 'A Thousand Words'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 9, 2012 - 11:12am

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Rating: **0.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The movie business is a funny thing in that EVERYONE involved with “A Thousand Words” has moved on and yet there are studio executives who still want you to care enough to open your wallet. Who didn’t care before you? The writers who delivered once of the worst scripts in years, the director who proved that his pedestrian work on “Norbit” and “Meet Dave” was the pinnacle of his abilities, and the producers who let this cinematic crime get even more stale than when it was shot. (For a fun drinking game, count the dated jokes from “Chili’s Baby Back Ribs” to Britney Spears’ tabloid life in a film that was shot in 2008). Everyone involved left it behind. Why should you care? Only the most masochistic connoisseurs of the truly awful need check it out.

With a ridiculous plot that will make you long for the subtlety of “Liar, Liar” and “Bruce Almighty,” “A Thousand Words” tells the story of literary agent Jack McCall (Eddie Murphy), another fast-talking Hollywood creation. Jack is one of those fast-talking types cut from the Ari Gold (from “Entourage”) mold, a guy who berates and ignores most of the people around him. However, in typical Hollywood fashion, he’s not really THAT bad a guy. What are his crimes? He fakes a phone call to get in front of the line at Starbucks in a way that would NEVER work in the real world. He forces his assistant (Clark Duke) to pick out marshmallows from his cereal. He is hesitant to give up the home he started his career in for a family one with his lovely wife (Kerry Washington) and child. He’s a prick for sure but it’s one of the film’s main flaws that he’s not a truly horrendous person, the kind who really needs to learn a serious lesson, and so we never really care about his turn-around.



A Thousand Words

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

The lesson of "A Thousand Words" begins when McCall courts a trendy New Age guru named Sinja (Cliff Curtis) in an attempt to sell his first book, one that everyone expects will set the charts on fire. Sinja and McCall couldn't be more dissimilar as one finds beauty in the small moments and the quiet of life and the other finds value in his lattes and star status. When McCall is at Sinja's commune, he pricks his hand on a Bodhi tree, which later appears in his own backyard. Sinja didn't send it as a gift but he has an idea as to why it's there. As the two soon learn, the tree is attached to Jack. Every time Jack speaks (or even writes a word on paper), a leaf falls. When all the leaves fall, the tree will die and so will Jack. Can Jack stay quiet? Can he find inner peace? Have you seen a movie before?

There's a foundation of life-lesson drama in "A Thousand Words" that isn't bad. Our society is cluttered with auditory pollution and all of us could learn the value of the words we speak. But ANY hope that Steve Koren's script is going to delve into this concept with any honesty or realism is dashed almost immediately when the first scene following McCall's realization that his life is limited to that of a Bodhi tree's is a goofy encounter at Starbucks where the agent tries to place an order. Yep, "A Thousand Words" is that kind of movie, one in which a man learns he needs to stay quiet or risk death and the first thing he does is go for a triple-shot latte. Every scene that follows through the slapstick-y second act is complete and utter nonsense.



A Thousand Words

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

It's not just the leaf-to-word connection. In a truly misguided screenwriting decision, McCall is also somehow physically connected to the tree. When it's watered during a meeting with a publisher, Jack sweats. When squirrels run up it, he feels them up his legs. And when the gardener uses a pesticide, we get a horrific scene in which McCall is essentially high at a lunch meeting. The image of Eddie Murphy stuffing a breadstick up Allison Janney's nose is one I won't soon forget.

None of the slapstick works because none of it is grounded in anything real. None of the actions feel like something someone would actually do in the same situation and so who cares? If the team behind "A Thousand Words" had gone totally broad with their humor, it might have worked, but it falls into that valley between emotional drama and stupid comedy, failing in both categories.

Until the final act when the writer and director predictably go for melodrama. The way that McCall's life supposedly falls apart in three days simply because he can't speak is just dumb. None of it makes sense. And so when Koren and Robbins go for the heartstrings in the final scenes, it's nauseatingly false. Bad comedy is one thing but bad comedy that uses devices like sick parents and deadbeat dads to hit emotional beats is something grosser. I wish some cinematic tribunal would pin Koren and Robbins down and force them to write a thousand words on what went wrong with this production. Or just "I won't do it again" two hundred times.

"A Thousand Words" stars Eddie Murphy, Cliff Curtis, Clark Duke, Kerry Washington, Allison Janney, and Jack McBrayer. It was written by Steve Koren and directed by Brian Robbins. It is rated PG-13 and was released on March 9th, 2012.



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