

‘Seeking a Friend for the End of the World’ Can’t Find Honest Emotion

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 22, 2012 - 11:12am

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Lorene Scafaria’s “Seeking a Friend for the End of the World” is a manipulative mess that’s only slightly redeemed by yet-another engaging performance from one of the best actresses of her generation. Even the always-great Keira Knightley can’t hold back the deluge of clichés and false characters that drag this piece down into the kind of dreck that would be universally derided if it just had the name “Nicholas Sparks Presents” in front of it. At least those films don’t put up false hipster pretenses of being something other than they are. By the end, I was just seeking an honest emotion.

Right from the first scene in Scafaria’s film, the world is going to go boom a la “Melancholia” or “Armageddon” (one of the few times you’ll hear those two movies compared in a sentence). We learn that the last attempt to stop the impending deep impact didn’t work out and so now it’s time to count off the hours until nobody feels fine any more. While Dodge (Steve Carell) watches his wife run panicked into a park never to be seen again, he takes the news with a bit more subdued resignation. He goes to work, continues to chit-chat with his cleaning lady, and even meets a cute girl next door, the beautiful Penny (Keira Knightley).



Seeking a Friend for the End of the World

Photo credit: Focus Features

While Dodge and Penny have been neighbors for years, the two have barely interacted (yes, this is another one of those Hollywood tales in which impending doom allows us to see what was in front of us all along...if you're lost in love, all you need to do is knock on your neighbor's door...good luck with that). Penny does have a creepy boyfriend (Adam Brody), the kind of hipster douche who only exists in the movies as no one in the real world would be quite so self-obsessed as the Earth was coming to an end unless it fit a plot. A riot pushes Penny & Dodge toward a wacky road trip of self-discovery as the two trek to a location where the latter thinks there may be a plane for the former to get back across the pond to see her family one last time.

Dodge reveals along the way that there are a few people he could reconcile with himself, including "the one that got away" and the pair is off. Their road trip starts on a relatively humorous, surface-level note as the pair finds a cheesy family restaurant that has basically turned into a sexed-up rave and even track down another one of Penny's ex-boyfriends (an effective cameo by Derek Luke). After a quick sexual fling in the car, Penny & Dodge vow that it was just the emotional heat of the moment that got them together and I found the potential honesty of that – the idea that any two people could end up together if the clock was ticking to midnight – refreshing.



Seeking a Friend for the End of the World

Photo credit: Focus Features

And then Scafaria's script turned on me. As much as I despise the final act of "Seeking a Friend," even I wouldn't spoil its twists other than to say that I didn't believe a single minute of it. From the engraved harmonica to the beach party to Dodge's reconciliation, I kept getting angrier and angrier at the pure, manipulative dishonesty of it all. There's nothing truthful here. This is not how real people act and it's a Hollywood writer's fantasy of the average schlub who finds blissful truth in his final days. There's potential in that idea but not with such a heartstring-tugging approach.

It doesn't help that Carell & Knightley have absolutely no chemistry. They often appear to be acting in different films as Carell overplays his schlub persona and Knightley seems more likely to run off with any of the sex restaurant workers than stick with him. I will say that the ensemble of recognizable faces is entertaining (more films could use likable actors like Connie Britton, Gillian Jacobs, and Patton Oswalt in cameo roles) and Keira Knightley continues to do no wrong. She's EASILY the best thing about the movie. Knightley continues to prove her status as one of the best of her generation, a woman who makes consistently interesting decisions when she goes through the numerous scripts she's surely offered. Even when she's in a bad film, she's typically great in it. But she can't save this "World."

"Seeking a Friend for the End of the World" stars Steve Carell, Keira Knightley, Adam Brody, Connie Britton, Rob Corddry, Melanie Lynskey, Patton Oswalt, T.J. Miller, Gillian Jacobs, Derek Luke, and Martin Sheen. It was written and directed by Lorene Scafaria. It opens on June 22, 2012.



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