

Movie Review: 'The Bucket List'

by *David_Elliott*

A two-character event, "The Bucket List" has two reasons to be seen: Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson.

Please don't say you know the drill, you know what these guys do and it's all been there, done that. Both men are 70 (Nicholson is 40 days older) and we may not get a large number of chances to enjoy them freshly again. And as jackpot talents, they do deliver.

'THE BUCKET LIST' - Jack Nicholson, left, stars as Edward and Morgan Freeman as Carter in the adventure/comedy film 'The Bucket List.' CNS Photo courtesy of Sidney Baldwin. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Freeman is Carter, a married garage mechanic who once had academic hopes and can get all the answers right on his fave show, "Jeopardy!" Nicholson is Ed, rich from the hospital biz, unmarried and with the fabled Jacko style that is like a bazooka sucking caviar.

They are parked in beds at the hospital Ed owns, with Carter grumpy about the pea soup and Ed simply grumpy all the time. And why not? Both have cancer and dim prospects. Of course, they snap and bicker like sitcom regulars.

But do not be put off by that, or the cancer, or Ed's shaved head with the big surgical scar. Or Carter retreating into "Jeopardy!" because the real jeopardy is now death and because he no longer feels very close to his wife of ages, Virginia (Beverly Todd).

Savingly, for the film, the old men revert to being boys. They draw up a list of things to do before they kick the bucket. Since Ed is rich, this means the big pig-out: sky diving, racing hot cars down a privately leased speedway, luxury food on the Riviera, visits to the Nile, the Taj Mahal and Hong Kong.

Nicholson remains an ego buccaneer, now robed in plenty of flesh. He is beyond vanity, while also seeming (at full toot) bizarrely youthful. It's a great contrast with Freeman's courtly reserve and senior-dude charm. When they are on top of a pyramid at Geezer ... oops, Giza, Freeman is like a wry pharaoh becoming a god.

The actors groove into such a sync that the obvious, corny traps of Justin Zackham's sometimes-deft script barely emerge. It is, of course, hard to believe that Nicholson could ever be a dying man - he's a life force even when looking like a bombed and beached Mickey Rooney. And if you think that studly Freeman is a guy who has had just one woman in his life, then you are truly a sucker for fine acting.

So, be a sucker. There is corn here, but it pops. After the painful early stuff at the hospital, the movie earns its amusing fantasy stretch, its wistful bits of pathos, its whimsical trick of the religiously faithful Carter finally commenting from Beyond.

Rob Reiner directed, rich in his relish of show-biz ways but, like the actors, not too smug about it. "The Bucket List" gets through its list while rarely seeming a chore. Its two great stars invite us into their company, often amusingly, always humanly.

A Warner Bros. release. Director: Rob Reiner. Writer: Justin Zackham. Cast: Jack Nicholson, Morgan Freeman, Sean Hayes, Beverly Todd. Running time: 1 hour, 44 minutes. Rated PG-13. 3 stars.

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