

## Movie Review: 'Dan in Real Life'

by David\_Elliott

The two good things in "Dan in Real Life" are right at the center: Steve Carell and Juliette Binoche. They are winsome and winning, but the script is taffy custard.

'DAN IN REAL LIFE' - Juliette Binoche (right) and Marlene Lawston share some quality vacation time soon after meeting in 'Dan in Real Life.' CNS Photo courtesy of Merie W. Wallace. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.)

Carell is Dan, a "real life" advice columnist seeking syndication. A widower, he devotedly fathers three girls, the cutest a howitzer of teen attitude. Binoche is Marie, a New Yorker who meets Dan cutely, then keeps meeting him cutely at the grand shoreline home owned by his family.

But Marie has just recently taken up with Dan's burly brother Mitch (Dane Cook). So while Dan and Marie are like two pieces of kindling wishing to strike a match, smitten Mitch hovers cluelessly until he hears the

backbeat and, of course, gets mad.

This is comedy, mainly because Carell is such an inflected comic player, with his darting eyes and bladelike nose. He takes amusing riffs into little corners of pathos and yearning. And it's comedy because Binoche has a swift sense of humor, responds with her native French tact (just a hint of accent) and seeks to cushion her covert suitor's floundering moves.

Peter Hedges, director and writer, really hedges his bet (sorry, Peter, but you earned it). Hedges did a blithe job on "Pieces of April," and some good writing for "A Map of the World," "What's Eating Gilbert Grape" and "About a Boy." Now he seems frantic to pop some plex corn.

Dan's daughters are served like adorable scoops, different flavors but really the same vanilla. The old beach town has places named Shack O'Shells, Book & Tackle Shop, Alley Katz Bowl. Dan's big family often breaks into strenuous darlingness: "salsa" dancing on the lawn, Kennedy compound touch football, a giddy talent show where Dan spills open some soul via guitar.

John Mahoney and Dianne Wiest plug in gamely but also rather lamely as Dan's parents. There is moist stuff about the dead mom, and teasing filler about a come-on wow (Emily Blunt) who can tease Dan, then compensate the inevitably crestfallen Mitch. The quirks and quips and cuddles get a helping but often hokey hand from the perky story songs of Sondre Lerche.

Whenever Carell and Binoche find comical sync, with some deft bit of business like their shower scene, overload arrives by someone else doing sitcom pouts, grins or gapes. What keeps us watching is that we enjoy Dan and Marie and want them to get together.

But that causes precious little suspense. In fact, no suspense, just precious.

A Buena Vista Films release. Director: Peter Hedges. Writer: Peter Hedges, Pierce Gardner. Cast: Steve Carell, Juliette Binoche, Dane Cook, John Mahoney, Dianne Wiest, Alison Pil, Brittany Robertson. Running time: 1 hour, 38 minutes. Rated PG-13. 2 stars.

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