Brad’s Status Review

* A father going through a midlife crisis takes his son to Massachusetts to tour colleges.
* Starring Ben Stiller
* Written by Mike White – School of rock, Orange County, Nacho Libre

The movie, maybe not ‘tackled’, but tinkered around with, certainly, some solid themes like how to measure personal success, and the rivalry and jealousy that comes along with certain long term friendships. But for all its solemn expression, the story never quite gets off the ground. The writer/director Mike White has penned some great movies in the past, but this one would have worked much better as a book. In fact, in watching this I almost convinced myself that not only must this be a poorly adapted novel, but that it was probably written by a female minority as a cheeky parody of what a white man’s “struggle” must be. In this fantasy, I even allowed myself to get a little worked up about the audacity of this fictitious writer. The double standard! That is, of course, until I realized this was written, in earnest, by a well-off Caucasian male whose last name is literally “White.”

Stiller (who’s a favorite of mine) makes two types of movies: over the top comedy blockbusters, and melancholy midlife crisis indies. And even though his melancholy midlife crisis movies are pretty much exclusively not good, simply refusing to watch them isn’t in the cards for me.

I’m a simple man. I like my movies to have up’s and down’s and obstacles to overcome and maybe even lessons learned. This movie, like a whole slew of films made in the last decade that are just like it, seem more like a visual recreation of an apathetic rant given on a psychiatrist’s couch, on a particularly nonproductive session, than a story.

There were plenty of places to go with this movie, but we we’re never taken there. It felt like an 1h 41min subplot with no conclusion. It had potential to be the best part of another film, but on its own, I found myself eating the popcorn quicker just so I had an excuse to mosey out and get a refill to kill a few minutes.

PERSCRIPTION:

For A better showing by Mike White: School of Rock or Orange County (Orange County even has a Stiller Cameo).

For a midlife crisis movie: Check out Sideways or American Beauty.