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"Limitless"? That's what you think

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NCR Today

Compared to this time last year when the only film that got my attention in the first months was "Winter's Bone," I have already seen some terrific films.

"Of Gods and Men," "Win Win," "Potiche" ("Trophy Wife"), "The Adjustment Bureau" though I have issues with it, and Julian Schnabel's "Miral." Today I saw "Limitless" and I cannot stop thinking about it. It is parked in my mind.

Ever have writer's block? The opening scenes of this film show the scruffy Eddie Morra (Bradley Cooper) fighting with a manuscript that cannot make its way from his head to the computer. His girlfriend Lindy (Abbie Cornish) has just broken up with him over lunch because he is going nowhere. He was briefly married once to Melissa (Anna Friel). As he leaves the restaurant, Melissa's brother Vernon (Johnny Whitworth) recognizes him on the street.

Eddie asks if he is still "selling" (drugs) and Vernon says, no. He's legitimate now. Eddie admits he isn't doing so well but he's not doing drugs or alcohol. As they part, Vernon gives him a tiny plastic bag with a clear pill in it along with a card with his address. Eddie resists but takes the pill.

All of a sudden he has clarity. All of a sudden, he is using all his brain, not just a small portion of it. As a writer, I could feel that same creative impulse when it surges and your fingers fly over the keyboard. The pure joy of creativity is a gift -- not a pill.

Eddie is hooked. He visits Vernon who sends him out to pick up his cleaning and get some breakfast. Eddie doesn't care; he will do anything for Vernon as long as he can get more pills. When he returns, Vernon has been shot in the head. Eddie, shocked, calls the police then searches for Vernon's stash. He finds a good supply and cash.

Now he does what anyone seeking to overcome writer's block must do: he cleans house, gets a haircut, buys some clothes and gets to work. He finishes the book and shocks his editor.

More clear than high, Eddie gets into finance to make money and takes a loan from a Russian mobster. He learns new languages, analyzes reports, and is introduced to Mr. Van Loon (Robert De Niro) who wants his incredible insight to help broker the biggest merger ever.

Eddie increases the dosage. He also becomes aware that there are side effects to this pill, MDT: blackouts, criminal behavior, loss of memory, loss of time. He learns early on it is not FDA approved as Vernon said and hires a chemist to recreate it.

Eddie seems to play it smart, he feels like God. He runs for U.S. Senator and has his sights on the presidency.

He isn't using all his brain; the part with conscience is missing. He has turned into a very fine-looking robot.

I won't give away the ending, but will comment on the fact that names in movies are important. Van Loon? Loons are slang for crazy people. In the end, who is crazy?

We cannot substitute authenticity or the artist's journey with a pill. There are consequences to short cuts and artificially induced and sustained power surges.

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One of the best movie lines last year was uttered by my younger sister, Libby. She's a nurse. We went to see Edward Zwick's forgettable "Love and Other Drugs." At one point, the character Jamie (Jake Gyllenhaal) dumps a load of Prozac in a big dumpster. A homeless man is attracted by the pretty packaging. And helps himself. When Jamie returns a few weeks later and dumps another load of Prozac samples in the dumpster, the homeless man is thrilled. This is when Libby uttered the memorable, "Oh, look at that. Trickle down pharmaceuticals."

The reality is, we are limited and the best art comes from the struggle to be fully human. True, for some artists, hallucinogenics and other pills took them unimaginable places -- but at what cost? Some never came back.

I think "Limitless" is a morality tale of sorts. Many critics think it could have been done better. Really? What part? Lots to think about. And I think it's a pretty good movie.

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