



ROY WALLER (NICOLAS CAGE) AND FRANK MERCER (SAM ROCKWELL)
RUN A SHADY WATER FILTRATION SYSTEM SCAM.

FRANÇOIS DUHAMEL, WARNER BROS., 2003.

A Gift for the Grift

One step up from the lowlife.

MATCHSTICK MEN: Directed by Ridley Scott. Written by Nicholas Griffin and Ted Griffin, based on the book by Eric Garcia. Produced by Sean Bailey, Ted Griffin, Jack Rapke, Ridley Scott, Steve Starkey. Executive producer, Robert Zemeckis. Cinematography, John Mathieson. Music, Hans Zimmer, with Geoff Zannelli, Jim Dooley. Editor, Dody Dorn. Production design, Tom Foden. Art director, Michael Manson. Set decorator, Nancy Nye. Costumes, Michael Kaplan. Starring Nicolas Cage, Sam Rockwell and Alison Lohman, with Bruce Altman and Bruce McGill. Warner Bros., 2003. PG-13. 120 minutes.

Nic Cage plays an eccentric con artist in Ridley Scott's offbeat thriller, based on a yet-to-be released book by Eric Garcia — a grifter named Roy Waller, who is one odd duck. He has facial tics, involuntary twitches, a Tourette's-like yelp and several pronounced obsessions. He's dependent on his medication to keep his anxieties under control, so when he accidentally sweeps his pills into the sink with the water on, a whole raft of undeserved trouble heads his way.

Cage gives Roy's affliction an over-the-top enthusiasm that accentuates the contrast with his more serious side and his faltering efforts at parenthood.

Ordinarily Roy keeps his condition hidden during the day and works high-pressure, low-ball scams with his up-and-at-'em partner, Frank (Sam Rockwell). These two are good at their game. Roy and Frank have figured how to actually bilk the same gullible consumers twice for the identical, worthless product.

When a 14-year-old daughter Roy never knew he had, Angela (Alison Lohman), seeks him out, Roy's game has to change. Roy decides to get more than his winks and spasms under control; he plans to go straight. Needless to say, the path from decision to implementation is not smooth. After agreeing to do one final, big scam with Frank, Roy finds himself and teen Angela in more serious trouble than he could have imagined.

Because so much of the film depends on our belief in Roy's credibility, the stakes are very high for Cage's performance. On the con, Roy's totally believable when he's medicated. But in what one would call his private life, Roy is a mess. He has no friends; he doesn't like the outdoors; he eats the same dinner every night — tuna from the can — and he is a neat freak. His house is spotless, including his closet.

Cage gives Roy's affliction an over-the-top enthusiasm that accentuates the contrast with his more serious side and his faltering efforts at parenthood. Cage did this or a reasonable facsimile thereof in *Adaptation*, where his brilliant performance as twin brothers afforded him the ultimate opportunity to split his persona and take both halves all the way. Before that, he was a twitchy paramedic running on empty during a three-day holiday weekend in Martin Scorsese's *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999).

I'm not ready to say that Cage doesn't make Roy real enough to believe in, but it is a borderline case. What I don't want to see is Cage squander his gifts by using physical gimmicks to bolster all his performances, like Robin Williams. Williams is a great natural comic; see his HBO

standup routine from last year if you have any doubt. But Williams carried over so much humorous body language and vocal genius into his serious work his credibility as an actor dropped to zero with me. Cage toys with that edge.

Rockwell and Lohman's performances stirred me in *Matchstick Men*. I missed Rockwell in George Clooney's 2002 *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, which played Eugene for a short a time and never came back, even though the film was re-released this year. He's made a big splash in indie films that also didn't come to local theaters: *Lawn Dogs*, *Safe Men*, and *Jerry and Tom*. I will see everything else Rockwell does, because he demonstrates here that he has the ability and range to carry a film.

Lohman (*White Oleander*) also shows her versatility in *Matchstick Men*, but I remember her from the short-lived Fox TV series, "Pasadena." She's good and is only going to get better, so I hope she doesn't get typecast as a spunky teen queen. Let's see her as a grown up; she can handle that.

Matchstick Men is now playing at Cinemark and Cinema World. Highly recommended.

CW

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UNDERWORLD* R 12:05, 1:00, 3:05, 4:00, 7:00, 7:30, 10:00, 10:30	OPEN RANGE* R 12:20, 3:40, 7:00, 10:20
ANYTHING ELSE R 1:15, 4:10, 7:25, 10:10	S.W.A.T. PG-13 7:10, 10:10
COLD CREEK MANOR* R 12:50, 3:50, 7:20, 10:25	FREAKY FRIDAY PG 12:45, 3:25, 7:05, 9:45
FIGHTING TEMPTATIONS PG-13 12:35, 3:30, 7:05, 10:15	PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN PG-13 12:10, 3:35, 6:55, 10:15
ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO* R 12:25, 1:20, 3:15, 4:05, 7:15, 7:50, 9:55, 10:30	SEABISCUIT PG-13 12:00, 3:10, [6:50], 10:05
CABIN FEVER *R 12:15, 2:30, 5:00, 7:35, 10:20	FINDING NEMO G 12:30, 3:20
MATCHSTICK MEN * PG-13 12:55, 1:25, 3:45, 4:15, 7:10, 7:40, 10:00, 10:30	SNEAK PREVIEWS: RUNDOWN PG-13 7:20 SAT ONLY [] REPLACED BY SNEAK PREVIEW

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BRUCE ALMIGHTY PG-13 [11:40], 2:20, 4:50, 7:30, 10:05	MATRIX RELOADED R [12:15], 3:35, 7:00, 10:10
CHARLIE'S ANGELS 2 PG-13 [11:35], 2:10, 4:45, 7:20, 9:55	28 DAYS LATER R [11:25], 5:05, 10:25
DADDY DAY CARE PG [11:55], 2:30, 4:55, 7:15, 9:40	SINBAD PG [11:30], 2:00, 4:30, 6:55, 9:30
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[1:30], 4:10, 6:50, 9:30,
***ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO**
[12:40], 4:59, 7:10, 9:20
***PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN**
[2:00], 5:10, 8:20
***COLD CREEK MANOR**
[12:50] 3:30, 6:10, 8:50
SEABISCUIT
5:30
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[2:30], 8:30
***FIGHTING TEMPTATIONS**
[12:30], 3:20, 6:00, 8:40
***MATCHSTICK MEN**
[1:00], 3:40, 6:00, 9:00
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