



Sibling Rivalry Taken to Violent Heights

Newsday; 9/13/1996; John Anderson

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09-13-1996

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By John Anderson. STAFF WRITER

(1 1/2 STARS) * 1/2 FEELING MINNESOTA. (R) Cain and disabled: Brothers war over a woman and a big bunch o' money in this unguided noirish missile. With Keanu Reeves, Cameron Diaz, Vincent D'Onofrio, Dan Aykroyd, Delroy Lindo. Written and directed by Steven Baigelman. 1:35 (sex, violence, adult language, adult situations). At selected Manhattan theaters.

A MOVIE THAT KICKS OFF with Johnny Cash roaring "Ring of Fire" and ends up with Bob Dylan torture-moaning the same tune over the closing credits begs the question: Is it the song or the singer? By the end of "Feeling Minnesota," you have to conclude that it's just not enough to put footloose amorality, casual viciousness and overriding doom on the big screen. There's got to be something to keep the self-assured bravado from becoming a self-conscious, raspy wheeze.

The debut by actor-turned-painter-turned-filmmaker Steven Baigelman, "Feeling Minnesota" gives us brotherly love at its most dire: As a kid, the neglected Jjaks (Keanu Reeves) was sent to live with his father because - as his pot-smoking mom Nora (Tuesday Weld) puts it - he came second.

Nora kept his older brother Sam (Vincent D'Onofrio) with her, raising an already dubious personality into an all-star loser and accountant for mobster Red (Delroy Lindo). Jjaks comes home on the day of Sam's wedding - to Freddie (Cameron Diaz), who's being forced to marry Sam as payback to Red - has sex with her in the bathroom, robs a

gas station, runs off with Freddie, and gets caught up in violence, murder and familial mayhem.

Just another day in Middle America? Or a copycat crime? Although "Feeling Minnesota's" title suggests the Coen brothers, it lacks the deadpan pseudo-seriousness of a "Raising Arizona" or, certainly, "Fargo." Within the progressively ruthless three-way dance of Jjaks, Sam and Freddie, we have a suggestion of "The Last Seduction," but without that film's amoral frankness or bite. The go-for-broke plot twists are daring, but because there's no sense of background to the characters, one gets the sense it's all being made up as Baigelman goes along. When Nora drops dead at the wedding, Ben the detective (Dan Aykroyd), a character straight out of Zap Comix, complains to Jjaks, "This always happens when you show up." And we ask what? When? And why do we have to ask?

Having the overexposed (Reeves), the underexposed (D'Onofrio) and the soon-to-be-overexposed (Diaz) is a mixed blessing for Baigelman, who shows talent if not vision. Diaz is not just among the sexier women in films, she's a good actress; D'Onofrio isn't afraid to play a hapless jerk and make him convincing. There's also a very likable if small performance by Courtney Love. But Reeves has basically one demeanor - a wholly introspective intensity frustrated by intellectual shortcoming - that brings the wider aspirations of "Feeling Minnesota" safely back into the bemused realm of Generation X thumbsucking. And that, I have to say, is the last thing we need.

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