

'Suicide' Invites Us To Laugh At Death

By Daniel Lehman

We've seen the setup a thousand times before: desperate man taps a friend to pick the lock and stand watch while he slips into the apartment and grabs the cash. They split the money and the man runs off to live the good life in California with the girl next door.

But the moment Kaz Malek (Pablo Schreiber) appears onscreen, we know that everything is about to go very wrong. With his well-intentioned bungling and goofy smile, Kaz is the type of whipping boy that black comedies thrive on, and "Invitation to a Suicide" is no exception.

Once inside, Kaz promptly works his spastic magic, and within moments he and Marcin (Marcin Gajowczyk) are forced to flee as both apartment and money go up in flames. Life quickly goes from bad to worse when Russian mobster Ferfichkin (Joseph Urla) returns to find the burnt remains of his money. Ferfichkin wastes no time in tracking down the duo, killing Marcin and delivering his ultimatum - Kaz gets him the \$10,000 by the next day or his father becomes Ferfichkin's next victim. With no one to borrow from and no way to make the money in time, Kaz decides to sell the only thing he has - his life.



Kaz gets a flash of inspiration



The big moment arrives

Convincing Ferfichkin to give him a few extra days, Kaz begins marketing his suicide with the help of his friend Krsyztof (Matthew Rauch), owner of the neighborhood funeral home. As the preparations continue and word of the plan spreads, Kaz finds himself becoming a local hero, even gaining the admiration of his hard-nosed father (David Margulies), who thinks Kaz is finally doing his part to save the family bakery. The only dissenter is Eva (Katherine Moennig), the girl of his dreams who is only now starting to pay attention to him. With the big day approaching and his celebrity growing, Kaz has to decide whose priorities to follow before time runs out.

Aided by sharp writing and John Zorn's superb score, the film moves along at a steady clip, and the witty interplay between the characters keeps the humor coming, neatly sidestepping the

slower moments that might put its darkly comic tone in jeopardy. In Mr. Urla's hands, Ferfichkin isn't the stereotypical mobster thug, but a charismatic businessman who happens to trade in death. Swapping stories with Kaz and offering pointers with casual ease, the pair's chemistry at times verges on that of a buddy comedy - until we're reminded of why Kaz is killing himself in the first place. Imbuing Kaz with dimwitted charm and an adamant - albeit clumsy - desire to do the right thing, Mr. Schreiber gives us a character we can cheer for and provides the perfect foil to Mr. Urla's Ferfichkin.

Laced with healthy doses of black humor and morbid one-liners, "Invitation to a Suicide" encourages us to laugh at death. Instead of tiptoeing around the subject or giving in to the temptation to turn the film into a moral story, director Loren Marsh takes every available opportunity to mock death, putting Kaz through increasingly degrading trials at every turn. By keeping the absurdity at full tilt, Marsh leaves every possibility wide open, and we're free to enjoy Kaz's mishaps, sensing that he could stumble into salvation by some bizarre twist of fate any moment.

And perhaps that's what Marsh is really trying to tell us - beyond the dark humor and irreverence, the film is as much about living as it is about dying. With his death in sight, Kaz is finally motivated to begin taking responsibility and living his life. By embracing his death, he's free to see his life for what it was - nothing can hold him back anymore. Things still might not go his way, but that's not what matters anymore - the fact that he stood up and tried is what counts. But at heart, "Invitation to a Suicide" is still a twisted comedy about death. Gritty looking and filled with gallows humor, it's too sick to be saccharine, and thus celebrates life in a way that most so-called "inspirational films" cannot. It takes our cynicism and points it back at us - by mocking death, it serves as an affirmation of life.



Kaz (Pablo Schreiber) steps over the edge

"Invitation to a Suicide"

Written and Directed by Loren Marsh

AFI Film Festival runs Nov 4-14 at the Arclight Cinemas in Hollywood

If you would like to find out more about Invitation to a Suicide visit the official website at:

www.invitationtoasuicide.com

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