

Money Monster (2016)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 38 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 4; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

For the love of money is a root for all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich

some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

1 Timothy 6:10

Although director Jody Foster's film is much in line with Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders' attack on the super wealthy, its bite is not nearly as deep, her film being far more of a hostage thriller than a social justice film like [99 Homes](#) or [The Big Short](#). However, this dramedy is well worth watching, especially the 3 minute or so hilarious scene in which young actress Emily Meade practically steals the show from its veteran cast members.

George Clooney is cable news host Lee Gates, patterned after Jim Cramer of CNBC's "Mad Money." In the 19th century Lee would be a traveling snake oil salesman. Today the costumed host stages bizarre routines involving hip-hop dancers to introduce each program in which he dispenses stock tips. Embellished with goofy sound effects and film clips, his outlandish show would have fit in well with the weird shows in Paddy Chayefsky's *Network*. Indeed when Lee's producer/director Patty Fenn (Julia Roberts) is lining up a satellite connection with Diane Lester (Caitriona Balfe) for a story about her Ibis Clear Capital's current problem, she assures the corporate spokeswoman that the interview will not be a grilling one, "We

don't do 'gotcha' journalism here. Hell, we don't do journalism, period."

Lee and his staff are preoccupied with their preparations for today's show, so they do not notice that a deliveryman has managed to sneak by security and is lurking in the wings of the set. Patty does catch a glimpse of him in her monitor, but assumes he is part of her boss's opening act. After his opening routine, Lee launches into a report that Ibis has just reported a loss of \$800 million due to a "glitch." The company and its loss are so huge that it is having a ripple effect on the whole stock market. Before Lee can connect with Diane Lester, a young man brandishing a handgun rushes onto the set. The crew also thinks he is part of Lee's act until the intruder fires into the ceiling to convince everyone that he is serious. The young man is angry at Lee because, based on Lee's enthusiastic stock tip, he had invested all of his inherited money in Ibis. Lee denies ever having done so, but when the gunman angrily demands that the control room bring up the clip, Patty frantically orders a technician to search for it. Sure enough, Lee not only had pushed the stock, his recommendation was way over the top.

The smooth talking Lee tries to reason with the man while taking in information from Patty on his tiny earbud. He repeats the claim by Ibis that the money loss was due to a "glitch" in the Internet, but the gun brandisher will not accept this. We soon learn that the interloper's name is Kyle (Jack O'Connell), who has been living in an outlying borough. Trying to build a nest egg for himself and his pregnant girlfriend Molly (Meade), he had followed Lee's enthusiastic advice, impulsively investing his entire savings of \$60 K in Ibis. During his loud rants he keeps saying what is now a signature charge from both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, "I'm telling you it's rigged!" Opening the boxes he takes out a vest filled with explosives wired to the detonator he holds in his hand. Forcing Lee to put it on, he explains that the

remote he is holding has a dead-man button which, if he lets up on it, will trigger the explosive device.

Other networks pick up the live proceedings, and soon people all around the world are watching, including a code writer in Korea who briefly had written something for Ibis. (We will see more of him later.) The New York Police Department are out in full riot gear and stationing snipers around the building while some sneak inside air ducts and up to a high catwalk where they have clear views of their target. Kyle refuses to talk with a hostage negotiator, demanding instead that the station get the head of Ibis so he can talk with him.

During this period the police bring in Kyle's girlfriend Molly in the hope that she can plead with him to stand down. This back-fires (in a humorous way, but only to the audience) when the angry young woman curses and roundly berates him for his stupidity, telling him that he is no man, but a born f-p. This tirade only strengthens Kyle's resolve to continue on. (There is a very sobering moment when Kyle, fully aware that he is being targeted by the snipers, quietly tells Lee that he will not walk out of the studio alive.)

There follows an interview with Diane Lesterm, even though her immediate superior had told her not to go on the air until they could talk with CEO Walt Camby (Dominic West). The executive has been unavailable because he is in the corporate jet returning from an overseas business trip. This is where the film obviously becomes a conspiracy thriller that involves searching the internet by Patty's hacker friends and a lot more. As the story enlarges beyond just the angry screwed guy seeking justice or retribution, we see Lee beginning to change from a smug jerk to a caring person Lee's sympathy for Kyle grows as he realizes that the police are trying to get a clear shot of the electronic connector on his vest so that they can then kill Kyle. Through all of this Patty keeps her cool, calmly giving Lee instructions on what he should say and do, while also, like a circus ringmaster. staying in contact with

Diane, the camera and stage crew, the police and hackers. She and Lee now are convinced that Kyle is right, that the loss of the money is due to a complicated conspiracy, and not by an accident.

Jack O'Connell as the wronged little guy is as good in his role as are Roberts and Clooney, so we come to care about this young man and his fate. Through him Lee becomes a better human being, thus making this thriller also a character transformation film. It may be dramedy, but the denouement is a mixture of Hollywood fantasy and reality. There is just enough of the latter to touch our hearts and leave us with—well, you go and see it for yourself.

Good preaching/Teaching moment about job dedication: After the film's climax the cameraman Lenny (Lenny Venito) who could have slipped away numerous times, stays with Lee and Kyle, even grabbing the hand-held one when they leave the studio and travel on foot to Wall Street to confront the CEO of Ibis. When asked why he did not leave the dangerous situation, he responds simply, "It was my job."

This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the June issue of VP.