

Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 98 min.

There have been some pretty crooked events in the financial world over the past decade or two. *Money Monster* attempts to tap into the anger that we’re all feeling by telling a story of Wall Street corruption. And yet, while the inspiration for this tale may likely have been true, this overly polished effort comes across as preposterous despite the best efforts of cast and crew.

The title refers to a financial show hosted by fast-talking Lee Gates (George Clooney), a man who does as much over-the-top entertaining as provide financial advice. Unfortunately for Gates, his show is suddenly stopped by the arrival of angry viewer Kyle Budwell (Jack O’Connell). Kyle has lost everything on a failed investment endorsed by the celebrity. Forced to wear a bomb, Gates is coached by producer Patty (Julia Roberts) to buy time while the police attempt to work out a rescue. As the host speaks with his captor and attempts to contact the corporate head who not only lost Kyle’s money but an additional $600 million dollars due to a “technical glitch,” it becomes clear that a deeper conspiracy is afoot.

Viewers can always count on solid work from the actors and they do their best to sell the less-than-stellar material. There aren’t any bad performances here, but the screenplay really lets down the performers. The events depicted never feel believable or realistic in any respect. Right off the bat, it’s difficult to believe that Kyle could simply stroll into a Manhattan TV studio with a gun and bombs.

As the situation escalates and policemen as well as a bomb squad get involved, it all becomes

even more preposterous. Hostages are escorted out of the studio and then proceed to follow events as they move outside the building - guess they didn’t need to be interviewed by authorities after their ordeal. One feels particularly bad for thinly written roles like that of a police chief (Giancarlo Esposito), who is given little to do but look confused for 90 minutes while the show host and producers appear to solve all of the issues raised.

Even the villain of the piece is inauthentic. While there are undoubtedly some horrible people manipulating the market for their personal benefit, this guy comes across as a Snidely Whiplash-type antagonist. For a man who has taken investors for millions of dollars through an elaborate scheme, he doesn’t come off as particularly sharp either. At the close, the film attempts to humiliate him on camera for the benefit of the audience, but it only adds to the phoniness of the situation.

Finally, there’s a strange sense of humor to the enterprise that doesn’t help matters. This includes a young producer who is constantly following the demands of his boss, getting himself into embarrassing situations in the process. It’s supposed to break the tension, but given the fact that this is happening in the middle of a bomb crisis, it appears completely out of place. One or two of the movie’s comments earn a laugh, but most fall flat.

You have to be in an incredibly forgiving mood to suspend disbelief and buy into all the events depicted in *Money Monster*. While the central idea may have had plenty of importance and value, the end product won’t provide much return on your investment.

By Glenn Kay
For the Sun