

*Jack and Morgan brilliant in terminal vehicle*

*Screenplay by Justin Zackham*

*Directed by Rob Reiner*

Jack Nicholson ... Edward Cole

Morgan Freeman ... Carter Chambers

Sean Hayes ... Thomas

Beverly Todd ... Virginia Chambers

Rob Morrow ... Dr. Hollins

Alfonso Freeman ... Roger Chambers

*Edward Cole: I envy people who have faith, I just can't get my head around it.*

*Carter Chambers: Maybe because your head's in the way.*

The Bucket List looked like one of several old-guy buddy movies in the vein of Jack Lemon and Walter Matthau in *The Odd Couple II*, *Grumpy/ier Old Men*, or *Out to Sea* or, more fittingly, Jack Lemon and James Garner in *My Fellow Americans*. But this one is more than just a frolic of buddy repartee and various sexual wannado's; it's actually a serious movie that strikes close to home (for Boomers and their aging parents) with a naturally humorous undertone.

From the special features we learn screenplay writer, Justin Zackham, came up with this idea of writing down a list of things one would want to accomplish should one learn one's time on earth was short. Oddly enough, Zackham made "making a movie about a 'bucket list'" one of the items on his own personal bucket list—though, so far as we know, Zackham doesn't have a terminal affliction—and *The Bucket List* became his Hollywood breakout story. In the movie the Morgan Freeman character, Carter Chambers, comes up with the list idea: he remembers it from a philosophy class in college.

Carter wasn't able to make use of his college experience, but he's worked his way up the skilled trades and is now a senior automotive mechanic with a encyclopedic Jeopardy-contestant mind. He's introduced to us while working on an engine with a younger mechanic, asking him questions from an almanac. From the gitgo we can tell Carter is not just a fact robot, but has a broad and deep understanding of history: His assistant asks, "Who invented radio?"; instead of simply providing the obvious answer (Marconi), Carter says, "Do you want the answer the book will say is correct or do you want to know who really invented radio?" [Answer: Nikola Tesla.]

In the same scene, Carter receives a phone call regarding some medical tests; in a perfect performance of coming to grips with bad news Freeman drops the phone and, in a daze, walks slowly out of the shop shadowed in the sunlight. It so happens he'll be taking his treatment in one of the many privatized hospitals owned by eccentric, opinionated billionaire Edward Cole (Jack Nicholson).

Next scene, Cole and his attorneys are arguing before some hospital public service panel that what his company does is good for everyone. For cost-cutting efficiency his hospitals have a policy of "two beds per room, no exceptions!" As Cole emphasizes that point, he's gripped by a harsh session of throat-clearing, which brings up a fair amount of blood on his handkerchief. Ouch! The next sequence of scenes are perfect, as they set up the relationship between the two strong-willed characters that seeds the plot. Predictably and ironically, Cole is destined for one of his own cancer-treatment hospitals and to a hospital bed in the same room as Carter Chambers—"two beds per room, no exceptions!"

Just before Cole arrives to his bed, his executive assistant Thomas (Sean Hayes)—Thomas' real name is Matthew, but Cole feels Matthew is too Biblical—pulls the curtains on the partition. He sees Carter laid up there in the second bed with the oxygen tubes and everything, and the following exchange ensues:

*Thomas: What are you doing here?*

*Carter: [Gasps.] Oh, fighting for my life. You?*

For some reason, that's right up on the list of my favorite dialog from the movie, and a concise picture of the type of man Carter is. He watches with a combination of amusement and resignation as Cole is wheeled

in kicking and arguing vehemently. Cole screams he wants all the information on his disease, he wants his meals delivered, his special coffee-making equipment, he wants Dr. Hollins (Rob Morrow) to stand and deliver now. And who the hell is this interloper in the room with him?! Carter says, "Pleased to meet you, too."

I'm not going to convey the many bits of conversation and life-raft ethical judgments the two men make to develop their relationship into something quite extraordinary, nor the items on the Bucket List. But trust me, you'll enjoy it. Even though it's Carter who's toyed with the list concept first, we see Cole taking the idea and running with it to the open field. Cole goes through a larger adjustment in dealing with his demise; and he's the more headstrong of the two as well.

By virtue of Cole's money they get to travel around the planet, and I must say one of the attractions of the movie is witnessing in quality cinematic images several of the Wonders of the World. Only a small amount of CGI (computer-generated imagery) was employed, and it was used very effectively. Certainly the traveling and staying at some of the most beautiful places in Europe, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Africa seems authentic. It's a beautiful world, and nice to know that the United States doesn't exhaust all the meaningful possibilities of vista.

One can't say enough about how terrific these two actors are: Freeman and Nicholson. In fact, their chemistry is such the movie industry would be remiss in not pairing them again in a similarly comic-drama concept. Let's face it, we're dealing with a serious subject, and to cover all the bases on the meaning of life and death in a manner that keeps the audience tuned in requires not just good writing but first-class acting. Morgan and Jack show an astounding awareness of just what and how to say or do with maximum effect.

Moreover, the actors, as they reach their rapprochement with the Grip Reaper, come up with the full range of feeling to handle the number of emotional crises that arise with their loved ones. That part of the plot is where the driven Edward Cole finally realizes he's an important part of the ongoing human family... and where the family man, Carter, refinds his roots.

From my perspective, the scenes in the hospital dealing with the infirmities and indignities are spot on; they're honest without being depressing, and they move the story forward. If I take off my transhumanist hat and view the prospects for mortality as natural and practically inevitable, then I can truly see in this movie conditions that may someday affect me... even imminently. When you reach late 50s in the current epoch, too many of our friends and family drop off the social calendar. And our parents are generally facing near-term the final outcome of the disease of senescence. What I'm saying is *The Bucket List* provides food for thought most of my peers and ancestors can identify with.

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*The Bucket List | Jack Nicholson | Morgan Freeman | Living to the Fullest*