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Stiller's 'Brad' reflects all of us, good and bad

Character's internal monologues save film about a Gen Xer seeing the world pass him

We know this guy. Brad Sloan's (Ben Stiller) life hasn't turned out as expected, and now, on the eve of a college tour in Boston with his charming and musically gifted teenaged son Troy (Austin Abrams), he is consumed by self-doubt and envy.

The world is no longer in love with him, and director Mike White's "Brad's Status" is the road trip through Brad's mind on his quest for midlife self-respect.

Brad lives in Sacramento, Calif., with his wife Melanie (Jenna Fischer, *The Office*) and Troy.

Brad was a journalist in the romantic post-Watergate years, and now runs a media nonprofit. Brad has one employee, who resigns, explaining he can do a lot more good by making tons of money and giving it away.

Brad's closest college classmates — now a film producer, a hedge fund manager, an internet mogul and a K Street consultant who teaches at Harvard — are successful beyond Brad's imagination.

His son has grown up almost without Brad noticing, and now Troy is at the beginning of a new and infinitely promising life, to which his father is only an outsider, looking in.

What saves the movie are Brad's interior monologues, acknowledging the what-ifs that everyone of a certain age has experienced ...

Brad's life is pleasant enough, yet in the world outside his Sacramento cocoon, he is constantly subjected to the micro-indignities inflicted upon somebody who is



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kind of a nobody — bad restaurant tables, ineligibility for upgrades and the excruciating humiliation of asking his cool-jerk friends for favors.

He feels he has run out of time and blames his wife, "maybe her contentment undermined my ambition."

His rich friends are as careless as Gatsby characters. Players respect players and although they are in communication with each other, the old gang expects Brad to understand that it's reasonable

think piece, not a great movie. It's hardly a movie at all. It's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," for Generation X (although we thought that ground was covered when Stiller starred in that movie in 2013). Like the Thurber character, Brad has an extensive fantasy life in which he romps the beaches of Maui with beautiful Harvard co-eds and outwits his condescending counterparts.

What saves the movie are Brad's interior monologues, acknowledging the what-ifs that everyone of a certain age has experienced — the shock that we are not still youthful enough to deploy on our own behalf the earned knowledge we've collected — but have kept to ourselves.

In its way, "Brad's Status" represents the voice of a generation — a generation whose members believed the universe would take care of them if they behaved righteously — only to watch wilier opportunists barrel ahead.

In Brad's world, the specter of dying broke torments even those who live comfortably.

Brad is an Everyman, habituated to his diminished standing until he realizes that the river has continued to flow without him. No amount of backpedaling will return his youth and idealism, or reinstall him at his peak.

The movie doesn't solve Brad's status issues, it puts them on the table. It is up to Brad to grow and resolve them through some combination of acceptance, appreciation and duty. It is the cycle of life.

We know this guy.

We are this guy.

for them to forget about him. One explains that he must end an awkward call with Brad in order to pick up after his dog.

"Brad's Status" is an earnest