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Golden arches, golden archetypes in 'The Founder'

Keaton puts on admirable performance as crafty salesman set on turning fast-food into fortune

Franchise, franchise, franchise!" bellows Ray Kroc, played by Michael Keaton, to the startled McDonald brothers, Dick and Mac (Ron Offerman and John Carroll Lynch) who own a hamburger stand in San Bernardino, Calif.

The restaurant is run on the "Speedee Service System" — devised by Dick, the dreamer of the two — which applies assembly-line efficiency to get burgers from griddle to bag in 30 seconds.

Dreams are admirable, but they can't beat what milkshake-mixer salesman Ray Kroc has — vision.

And the personalities of the three men follow well-established 1950s sitcom archetypes: Dick McDonald is Wally Cleaver, Mac McDonald is "Beaver" Cleaver and Kroc, of course, is Eddie Haskell.

The McDonald brothers tried franchising before, but they found it impossible to control quality standards. Franchisees kept adding off-contract menu items that slowed down service and

diluted quality.

After the war, drive-in restaurants were extremely popular. Service was slow, taking 20 minutes or more for food to reach the customer.

Overhead costs and turnover rates were high, due to reliance on car-hop waitresses who were harried and frequently harassed. Worst of all, the car-park culture attracted that most undesirable of undesirable elements: teenagers.

Through planning and practice, the McDonald brothers eliminate these obstacles. Iteration by iteration, they perfected their system at the San Bernardino hamburger stand.

They are ripe for the plucking. Michael Keaton carries away



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the movie. He won an Academy Award for the 2014 film "Birdman," and his performance in "The Founder" is no less compelling. Even so, Keaton's virtuosity is underappreciated, and it is wonderful to watch him soar.

Ron Offerman is perfectly cast as the gruff, sympathetic Dick McDonald. It's time, though, for Offerman to start showing off his

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range. Maybe an action movie would provide the opportunity for him to give us a little more Riggs and a little less Murtaugh.

I was surprised and moved by a detail in the movie's ambient sound effects. The yellow neon lights that illuminate the golden

arches spanning the early restaurants can be heard to crackle and hum with a soft, distinctive, light-saber buzz. It was the sound of summer in a Midwestern childhood.

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Kroc threatens to overwhelm the McDonald brothers with legal costs rather than adhere to the terms of their agreements. Having taken a 1.4 percent royalty on 15-cent hamburgers, Kroc is all cash flow and no assets until a helpful lawyer gives Kroc a bit of billion-dollar advice. "You're in the real estate business, not the burger business," his counsel advises.

Kroc should buy the land and lease it to the franchisees. He can even revoke leases when franchisees don't stick to quality standards.

Kroc's a taker, not a maker. So when the brothers complain they were the ones to come up with the Speedee System concept, Kroc counters that he was the one who came up with the concept of winning.

"Do you know what the difference is between me and you?" Kroc asks the McDonalds. "If my competitor were drowning, I would walk over and put a hose down his throat. Can you say you'd do that?"

We know he speaks the truth.

And so it happens that "The Founder," an exhilarating adventure in salesmanship, which opens on the day of the presidential inauguration, is the first film of the Trump era.