

Preachy, Absurd 'Seven Days in Utopia' Weakens Own Message

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 4, 2011 - 7:40am

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Rating: **1.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – What do Robert Duvall and Melissa Leo have in common? They both have won an Oscar and they both cashed a paycheck for the fake virtuous hack job called “Seven Days in Utopia.” For Duvall especially, maybe the mortgage payment is due on the vacation home.

Utopia takes a unholy sport, golf, and tries to bless it with some sort of come-to-Jesus importance that ends up being embarrassing for all involved (again, especially Duvall). In a story that only could be invented in the mind of a feverish Christian golf addict, Utopia can only exist within that segment of the United States population who long for something this country has never had.

Luke Chisholm (Lucas Black) is a rising Texas golf pro who flakes out on the final hole of a Lone Star State golf tournament that he has well in hand. He takes some bad advice from his caddy, who is also his father (Joseph Lyle Taylor), as he melts down. This is indicative of the pressure that Daddy has put on him his entire life, and he leaves the tourney in a huff, peeling rubber and driving into the Texas void.



Picture This: Lucas Black as Luke and Robert Duvall as Johnny in 'Seven Days in Utopia'
Photo credit: Van Redin for Utopia Pictures

He ends up wrecking his car in Utopia, Texas (he almost hits a cow, ha-ha), and is found by a lovable old coot named Johnny (Robert Duvall), who happens to be a former golf pro. How fortuitous for Luke! In between staying at the Old Country Inn, run by the irascible Mabel (Kathy Baker), and wooing the town virgin, Sarah (Deborah Ann Woll), Luke learns to channel his rage into something more important, like using a bizarre putter and a Bible to win golf tournaments. Oh yeah, there's the Widow Lily (Melissa Leo), mother of Sarah, and the old villain-who-turns-out-to-be-a-friend, Jake (Brian Geraghty).

It's really hard to understand what the film is trying to accomplish. As presented, it seems a monumental stretch to solve the loss of golfing skills with the solutions that Luke is given (an old coot, a Bible and a new putter). Yes, golf is a mental game (and you have to be crazy to play), but any Psychology 101 student could see it was his father that made him a loser. Crusty but benign Robert Duvall, the town virgin and that old time religion are not going to solve childhood slights that has been ingrained for years.

The town of Utopia is very strange, with shades of the broad strokes that was depicted in the film "Pleasantville" (1998), except that movie was a satire. Everybody is white and content, with plenty of time to sit around and exchange wisdom. The Old Country Inn is exactly what is expected, with clean American rooms and a busybody proprietor who has more rooms than guests (like Norman Bates). For color, they throw in a villainous guy named Jake. It seems he is jealous that the town virgin (funny she likes horseback riding) takes a shine to Luke, but ends up playing an odd game with a group of men, while Robert Duvall looks on lovingly. Weird state of mind, this Utopia.

With all of this going on, it just is uncomfortable that the town opens its soul to help....a golfer? A guy with no fashion sense? Someone who could possibly end up partying with Tiger Woods? Of all the people to help, shouldn't the golfer be low on a priority list? The message of film, hidden behind all the golf psychology, is overt religiosity. When Duvall gives Luke a Bible, there is an immediate sense that the financing for the film came from above (a church board of directors). The golf stuff and the false Utopia all exists to push the good book, which in context comes off as cynical.



Dreams of Oscar Past: Robert Duvall and Melissa Leo as Lily in 'Seven Days in Utopia'
Photo credit: Van Redin for Utopia Pictures

And what about the other Oscar winner, Melissa Leo? This is her second film after earning the Academy Award for "The Fighter" and her timing could not have been worse. She is talented presence in other TV shows and films, and here she is lost in the background as the widow Lily in a bad film. Duvall should be even more embarrassed to put this character on the shelf next to Boo Radley, Frank Burns, Tom Hagen, Frank Hackett, Lt. Col Kilgore and The Great Santini. Why should he have to do damage control on that kind of legacy?

There is a persistent need for segments of the U.S. population to create a world, almost like Oz, about an American "utopia" that doesn't exist, where god-fearing people are constantly spiritual and wise. This golf parable is a perfect example, supposedly celebrating what is great about that life, but really making it look cheap and dishonest.

"Seven Days in Utopia" everywhere on September 2nd. Featuring Robert Duvall, Lucas Black, Melissa Leo, Kathy Baker, Joseph Lyle Taylor and Deborah Ann Woll. Adapted by David Cook (from his book), Rob Levine, Matt Russell and Sandra Thrift, directed by Matt Russell. Rated "G"



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [15]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [14]

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