

Diablo Cody Loses Tone in Awful 'Paradise'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 21, 2013 - 8:56pm

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Rating: **1.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Diablo Cody's directorial debut, "Paradise," now available everywhere On Demand and released this Friday in some markets theatrically, is an unmitigated disaster. It's the most tonally inconsistent film of 2013, a flick that fluctuates wildly from broad satire to manipulative drama to something altogether indescribably bad. Julianne Hough sleepwalks through Cody's worst effort to date as a writer and only supporting turns by the always-game Russell Brand and never-bad Octavia Spencer save the film from being a strong candidate for the worst of the year. It still comes close.

Lamb (Hough) survived such a horrible plane crash that most of the skin burned off her body, leaving her questioning the God-is-always-there faith instilled in her by her ultra-religious parents (Holly Hunter & Nick Offerman). In the opening scenes, Lamb has been asked to speak at her family church about how her recovery has helped her get closer to God and she uses the opportunity to deny his existence instead. It's mere minutes into a Cody script and our lead is saying "*There is no God*. It's just too easy. As Lamb politely tirades against her taught creator, the churchgoers lose their minds, shouting "*Socialist!*" and "*Democrat!*" It's the kind of broad satire that feels beneath Cody as a writer. And it won't be the last time.



Paradise

Photo credit: Image Entertainment

After her church outburst, Lamb decides to travel to what she considers the moral antithesis of her Montana upbringing – Las Vegas. After a horrendously written scene in a cab and a few bits of monotonous narration from the simply unengaged Hough, Lamb ends up at a casino bar that features "Bartainers" or bartenders who also sing. While a tone-deaf woman barely gyrates, Lamb meets the kindly William (Russell

Brand), forges a friendship with singer Loray (Octavia Spencer), “drinks” her first shot of Peach Schnapps, and tries to get into the night life of Vegas.

Sorta. Not really. This night life version of Vegas feels nothing like the real thing, again falling into a chasm between satire and realism. Cody can’t possibly believe that the first guys Lamb would encounter in an elevator would ask if the curtains meet the drapes or that the first girls she passes in a hall would talk about puking and yet I’m not sure that degree of writing qualifies as satire either. It’s just bad comedy. Lamb talks about wanting to be a “regular American” but it feels like Cody has no idea what that means.



Paradise

Photo credit: Image Entertainment

Bad comedy can be easily forgiven but “Paradise” plummets to lower depths when it gets sentimental and manipulative, most egregiously in a horrendously conceived and written scene with a prostitute (Kathleen Rose Perkins) in a bathroom. In an exchange that feels endless, all of Cody’s tonal problems come to the surface and Hough’s limited range makes us realize that what we’re watching just doesn’t feel genuine. Spencer does her best with her poorly-written character (and seeing her sing Radiohead’s “No Surprises” at a Vegas bar has an “you don’t see that every day” kick to it) and Brand actually annoys less than usual, finding an easy-going charm to William that would have been better served by a different movie.

What “Paradise” proves to me is that Jason Reitman found a way to ground Diablo Cody’s writing in something relatable and believable that she simply can’t find on her own. The snark is still here. The cynicism is still here. But the truth and the genuine characters of “Juno” and “Young Adult” are nowhere to be found. They left this “Paradise” long ago.

“Paradise” stars Julianne Hough, Russell Brand, Octavia Spencer, Nick Offerman, Holly Hunter, and Kathleen Rose Perkins. It was written and directed by Diablo Cody. It is now On Demand and playing in limited theatrical release.



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