

## Two Stories Clash in Uneven ‘Rules Don’t Apply’

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Movie icon Warren Beatty had wanted to make a film about 20th Century billionaire Howard Hughes for close to 40 years. On the heels of Martin Scorsese’s “The Aviator,” Beatty has written, directed and portrays Hughes in “Rules Don’t Apply,” and has created a strange farce about the mogul and a romance tale around him.

The two styles of stories clash with each other, as Beatty tries to be a completist in both. Watching the film, it favors Beatty’s portrayal and story about Hughes, with the romance of Frank and Marla – both Hughes employees – flitting around like an unwelcome guest. The film is interesting, however, as Beatty pays meticulous tribute to 1958 Hollywood, the year he came there to start his career. Howard Hughes ends up being the fly in the ointment for the couple, and the couple distracts from Hughes’ mad dash to avoid his company responsibilities and begin his life as a recluse. Even though the two stories collide unsubstantially at various points, the old Warren Beatty commitment to narrative detail ultimately makes the film worth seeing.

The story begins in 1964, as Howard Hughes (Warren Beatty) has begun his recluse phase, and he is scheduled to talk via phone to investors and interested press to prove he is still of sound mind. His aide, Frank (Alden Ehrenreich), is facilitating the situation, and doesn’t think it’s going to happen. This spurs a flashback to his first days with Hughes, in Hollywood during 1958.



Marla (Lily Collins) and Frank (Alden Ehrenreich) in a Scene From ‘Rules Don’t Apply’

*Photo credit: 20th Century Fox*

Frank began as a driver, and one of the people he drove around was Marla (Lily Collins), a fresh-off-the-bus starlet from Virginia, who Hughes is mentoring to be a actress at his studio. Frank and Marla have an attraction for each other, but each is committed to their faith, which forbids pre-marital sex. Hughes, in the meantime, infiltrates the budding relationship, and changes both their lives.

Beatty has been insisting in interviews (see link below) that this isn’t a biography of Howard Hughes, but a exploration of sexual morality in America in the 1950s – and if anybody knows about that, it is him. The most fascination element of that discovery is the religious declarations that Frank and Marla make, or are programmed to believe, in spite of their burgeoning attraction. Hollywood has always led the way in using sex as a marketing tool, so to be confronted with all of that directly while trying to be “good” was torture, as depicted.

Howard Hughes is used as kind of a abiding angel over the couple, and Beatty joins Leonardo DiCaprio (“The Aviator”) and Jason Robards (“Melvin and Howard”) as the eccentric Hughes, on the edge of madness, trying to out-quirk his pursuers. At these points in the film it becomes a farce, as Hughes could order a whole wing of rooms in a hotel, and pretend he’s in every room. The lawyers and the investors wait around, their faces turning purple like a cartoon. Those who waited were movie star cameos, portrayed by Oliver Platt, Alec Baldwin and Paul Sorvino, among others.





Warren Beatty as Howard Hughes in ‘Rules Don’t Apply’

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

It’s unfortunate that two stories had to be told, because in trying to bring them to a conclusion, and in this case allow them to come together, was awkward and compromising. Both stories, if done by themselves, might have been better movies. Howard Hughes is a fascinating subject on his own, why subject him to being a bizarre cupid-like overseer? Alden Ehrenreich and Lily Collins were fine as the couple – Lily even sang a poignant song based on the title – but being shuffled to the background when the story shifted to Hughes took away their depth, and their motivations became blurred.

The re-creation of 1958 Hollywood was a highlight, as Beatty’s production designer found some authentic rear projection from that era, so when Frank was driving the car it looked exactly like the Los Angeles of the era was going on behind him. If only he had kept on driving, away from Howard Hughes and into his own story.

**For an interview of writer/director/producer Warren Beatty for “Rules Don’t Apply,” by Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, [CLICK HERE](#). [20]**

**For an interview of actors Alden Ehrenreich and Lily Collins for “Rules Don’t Apply,” by Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, [CLICK HERE](#). [21]**

*“Rules Don’t Apply” opens everywhere on November 23rd. Featuring Warren Beatty, Lily Collins, Aiden Ehrenreich, Matthew Broderick, Candice Bergen, Martin Sheen, Ed Harris, Alec Baldwin, Oliver Platt and Annette Bening. Written and directed by Warren Beatty. Rated “PG-13”*



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