

# 'Salvation Boulevard' comes with mean-spirited humor



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A good satire is biting without drawing blood. Director George Ratliff ignores this general rule of thumb in "Salvation Boulevard," which makes a bloodbath out of skewering Christian fundamentalists.

Ratliff takes the novel of the same name, written by Larry Beinhart, and draws from the dark humor and wide-spread hypocrisies found in what can be considered more of a sickness than a religious experience. The subject material is rife with potential for great satirical comedy. Unfortunately, the final product is more of an attack — even the plot is hurt by Ratliff aiming it straight for the jugular of the mega-church lifestyle.

As the film opens, we meet Carl Vanderveer [Greg Kinnear] in the process of video recording his story of flowing alcohol, hallucinogens, and carefree sex as a Deadhead. His past and eventual salvation serves

as inspiration for his fellow members of the Church of the Third Millennium. Pastor Dan Day [Pierce Brosnan] cites Carl's life as inescapable proof of God's existence at every possible opportunity ... including in his best-selling novels and during his speaking tours.

Pastor Dan represents the most grotesque kind of stereotype imaginable for those who quickly change the channel the moment "700 Club" comes on TV. He is self-righteous — claiming to be the anointed messenger of Christ — and greedy — caring first about his plans for a new multi-million dollar Christian community to be built around his new cathedral. It is Dan's self-righteousness that gets him — and Carl — into trouble when he accidentally shoots an atheist college professor [Ed Harris] during a shared nightcap one evening. Seeing the incident as a threat to his future community, Dan sees Carl as a link to this dark affair that needs to be removed.

Once the film's plot is set in motion, the film takes no prisoners in its crusade to mock every possible aspect of moral rigidity. From the blind trust of the church's cameraman [Jim Gaffigan]

in Dan — who sends him to murder Carl — to the creepy purity ball Carl's daughter is forced to attend or face the constant reminder that those in Dan's "flock" are unreasonable and devoid of common sense. "Salvation" never ceases in its mission to instill in viewers a deep-seeded distrust of all things overly devout. This litany of religion-bashing humor eventually becomes as tiring as a poorly written sermon.

Also draining on the viewer is the fact that most of the characters never act logically. Of course, satire is all about making what seems perfectly sound into something illogical. In a good satire, someone like Dan would put total faith in God to "fix" everything. This would result in either everything working out for him or everything going wrong. In "Salvation," he leaves the handling of his biggest problem to his of a cameraman, which immediately signals to us the film's likely outcome. This is done only to illicit laughter, which it seldom does.

The strongest aspect of "Salvation" is delightful performances from a of couple actors. As Carl's life unfolds like a Bob Hope character in a "road



Photo courtesy of rottentomatoes.com  
Honey Foster (Marisa Tomei) attempts to explain herself to Gwen Vanderveer (Jennifer Connelly) after she witnesses Vanderveer's husband being kidnapped in the 2011 comedy "Salvation Boulevard."

picture," Kinnear never loses the lovable look of eternal confusion and innocence we come to feel an obligation to protect.

Despite his success in the role, Kinnear is overshadowed by Jennifer Connelly, who plays Carl's über-Christian fundamentalist wife, Gwen. Connelly's performance is made all the more impressive by treading on over-the-top, without ever actually reaching that level. The result is one of the best supporting film performances of the year.

Brosnan seems to grasp

that Dan is supposed to be a complex man with many facets. However, the writing never alludes to the truth behind the man. Is he a con-artist or more naive than his followers? Is he a sleaze or a psychopath? We are never sure. And apparently, Brosnan never discovered who Dan really is either, because he plays the character all over the board. He cannot even manage to keep the accent consistent.

Satire is a tricky genre in which to dabble, and "Salvation" does not do it well. There are some

laughs — Gaffigan's cameraman politely asking Carl for matches with which to light him ablaze is silly enough for a chuckle, and the scene in which Dan shoots the professor is hilarious purely for its suddenness — and the film's pace is perfect. However, most of "Salvation" becomes an exercise in tolerance. If you can sit through to the end of the picture without even the tiniest bit of resentment towards the film's creators for their hurtful comedy, then you are indeed tolerant.

## Entitlement edges out responsibility



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I was fumbling with my wallet at the cash register of a Subway restaurant this summer when I noticed a nearby tip jar, an alarming sign of our culture's ridiculous entitlement attitude.

"Why in the world would I tip these guys," I thought. I'm certainly not against tipping — I pride myself on being generous when it comes to gratuity — but these workers are making at least minimum wage and don't depend on tips as a majority of their income. Why do they feel entitled to a tip?

This "I deserve" attitude doesn't stop at the tip jar. When Netflix announced a rate hike this summer, outraged customers made sure their voices were heard. "That's not fair," they tweeted, "I'm cancelling my subscriptions," they blogged.

What, they've never heard of inflation? As a Netflix patron myself, I wasn't too pleased, but to say that what the company did was "disloyal" went a little too far.

Other examples of this include most situations involving a bratty child. Remember the last time you baby-sat and when the parents came home, the child demanded a reward for behaving? Since when do children deserve rewards for following the rules? That's called being a member of civil society. How about the attitude that if we do something nice for someone else, they should do something nice for us — whatever happened to doing something nice just for niceness' sake?

I'm not claiming to be perfect. I've ordered water and filled my cup with soda because, hey, I'm a paying customer, I deserve a free drink. I took a copy of Beyonce's new

album from a friend because we all know the diva can spare a few dollars, and I'm just a poor college kid. When I cut my toe on a New York City subway platform this summer and had to get stitches, I even thought about contacting the Metropolitan Transit Authority, demanding free rides for the rest of my stay. Looking back, this is

gratification is to blame. Per the Declaration of Independence, all Americans are granted life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, yada yada yada. We also are given the right to vote, speak freely, own guns and pray to whatever god, goddess, animal or flying spaghetti monster we choose. Compared to the rest of the world, we already are spoiled the moment we're born, so it's no wonder we have high expectations in all areas of our lives.

Our parents teach us we can achieve anything and spoil us with the tools to get there, but often forget to instill the virtues of hard work and responsibility that are necessary to succeed. The importance of education and money in society tells

us we deserve all these things, but we rarely hear about the millions of others in the world who don't make it past elementary school. Just because we are given opportunities that are rare elsewhere doesn't mean we can take them lightly and without some good-old-fashion hard work and responsibility.

The effects of this attitude are more than just a cranky mood — cultivating a cultural sense of entitlement will cause heavy consequences. Entitlement is the opposite of responsibility. When people feel entitled, they lose a sense of ownership for the situation. Do I think I deserve a good job after I graduate? Heck yes, but just because I worked hard in college doesn't mean I should get one automatically—I need to work for it. Do I feel entitled to breathable air, litter-free sidewalks and non-acidic rain? Sure do. But it's my responsibility to do what I can to create that environment, not just rely on others.

So I'm entering this upcoming semester with a goal to expect less. Despite what my logic tells me, I am not entitled to an A in my math class simply because I showed up to class, and no, Sodexo should not comp my meal because I was less than satisfied with the texture of the mashed potatoes. This year, I will stop asking to speak with the manager, and instead think twice about opening my mouth to complain about something beyond anyone's control. I will make time to be grateful for the things I am given, and maybe even the things I am not. Because while the guy behind the counter at Subway might have forgotten my pickles, at least I have a sandwich.

"Suffragettes protesting for the right to vote? Go for it. A woman suffering from lack of caffeine protesting Starbucks for too much foam on her latte? Simmer down."

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