

An okay whodunit in the beautiful people set

Novel by Jon Bokenkamp

Screenplay by Todd Komarnicki

Directed by James Foley

Halle Berry ... Rowena Price

Bruce Willis ... Harrison Hill

Giovanni Ribisi ... Miles Haley

Richard Portnow ... Narron

Gary Dourdan ... Cameron

Florencia Lozano ... Lieutenant Tejada

Nicki Aycox ... Grace Burden

Well, at least beautiful insofar as Halle Berry goes. I must comment right off the top this actress is a primetime perfect 10; and it isn't done with fuzzy lenses either! *Perfect Stranger* comes along early in 2007 with a lot of critical disdain (Rotten Tomatoes' critics are only 10% pro). Typically, the negative critics argue that Berry and costar Willis mail in their performances in a weak vehicle.

Sorry, I don't go along with the critics, or at least not to the point of panning the movie. It certainly isn't either of the actors' finest hour, but it doesn't fall to the level of cheap (i.e. expensive) opportunism either. The plot moves along with logic and effective, emotive, believable acting leading to a resolution that I believe few will expect. It holds one's interest and makes sense, even though occasionally straining one's credulity regarding motivations.

Is the resolution arbitrary? Well, you be the judge.

The main character is Rowena (Ro) Price (Berry) who has a killer instinct for bringing down powerful men who abuse their trust; in the opening scene she pins down a staunchly antigay US Senator who is having liaisons with young men. Sound familiar? Helping her with the high-tech Internet trappings—the movie seems quite sophisticated from the geek squad perspective—is fellow newspaperman Miles Haley (Giovanni Ribisi).

Unfortunately, the Senator's higherup moneyed friends influence the newspaper chain of command to kill the story. Ro and Miles are in a local NY bar getting pissed (in the British sense of the word) when she's informed of that. She becomes properly pissed (in the angry sense of the word) and quits in a righteous huff. Conveniently, a loose young blond former neighbor of hers Grace (Nicki Aycox), catches up with Ro on her way to the subway.

Grace has had a fling with advertising magnate, Harrison Hill (Willis) and doesn't want to let it go. Grace wants Ro to help Grace get back into being Hill's primary slut and hands her some supposedly incriminating email messages. Grace's main idea is to blackmail Hill by threatening to expose him to his wife, a control freak even more wealthy than he is.

For journalistic superstar on the rise, Rowena Price—and I admit the writers don't establish much of a foundation for Ro's stature in the journalism field—the timing couldn't be better. Her craving for bringing down powerful men gets another big jolt. She starts working for Hill's company as a temp (I don't know much about fashion, but I'm thinking her stunning outfits are *not* typical of temporary clerical women in the workforce, even in NYC—so I suppose that's another chink in the believability armor).

We get a bird's eye view of how a high-powered ad company might actually operate in the Big Apple; I think Willis carries his role well, sort of a high-octane, smooth, civilized, womanizing, type A+. One of the company's clients is Victoria's Secret, another Reebok; so we're obviously seeing one of the cream of the crop firms here. Naturally, Hill comes on to Ro. Duh!

But right about the time Ro lands the position with Hill's agency, we learn Grace has been killed... in a peculiar way with some exotic poison, used in very small doses in the fashion world to dilate pupils, poured into her eyes. Bummer. Ro is distraught, and thinking Harrison Hill is the most likely murder suspect, she becomes more intent than ever to get the goods on him. She and Miles, hacker extraordinaire, concoct a seductive chat room approach.

So this is about where I'm going to leave it. As a viewer, I'm naturally inclined to see Hill as the killer: he's rich, powerful, and gets extremely pissed when he's crossed. I believe Hill had also gotten wind of Grace's

plot to shake him down. But some other characters seem to have motive, too: Hill's rich, jealous wife, even Miles—Ribisi is one of the best actors in Hollywood for playing whack jobs—who is brilliantly weird in his infatuation for Ro.

So, a 7 possibly a 6+.

Some good music, including an Etta James cut that isn't "At Last." As I'm watching, I'm feeling how the producers are younger, trying to appear hip to the younger 20-something primetime, season-of-the-rising-sap crowd. The lingo is pretty raw and feelings are expressed in a similarly unadorned manner; nobody seems to be aware of who, say, Emily Post is. :)

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Perfect Stranger | James Foley | Halle Berry | Bruce Willis