

■ **Movie review**

# 'Constantine' masks its arbitrary plot with meaningless, flashy images

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Sometimes movies can make you weep, sometimes they can make you jump and sometimes they can make you laugh until your sides hurt. Sometimes they can just make you sigh as they crush you under the awesome weight of their mediocrity. If you see enough movies, the latter feeling is, unfortunately, the most common one.

"Constantine," starring Keanu Reeves and Rachel Weisz, is an adaptation of the DC/Vertigo comic book "Hellblazer," which doesn't work as a comic book adaptation. It is also a sort of horror/action film that fails to build any suspense or to pull together at least one fright.

The film deals with the adventures of John Constantine, a man who works as a sort of intermediary between the planes of Earth, Heaven and Hell, "deporting" demons who overstep the rules of a balance set up by God and Satan. With me so far? The film's metaphysics are mildly interesting, but it soon becomes clear that nothing interesting is going to be done with them. Instead, the script turns the ideas of sin and

redemption into nothing but a set of arbitrary rules that all characters must follow. Dumbing down religious ideas into nothing more than superhero fodder really sucks all the fun out of them.

The main thrust of the plot has to do with the spear that pierced Jesus' side as he fell into the hands of the son of the devil, who hopes to use it to take over Earth. The plot hardly matters in the context of the film, which is all about image and style. Pretty pictures flash before your eyes and it really doesn't make any difference what you are looking at. It's emotionally disconnected. Lacking too much in the way of original ideas, it rides a wave of clichés to make it through to the end. The performances are entirely unconvincing, without a strong role in the group. Though he's not the worst, Reeves in particular is noticeably unremarkable. He simply cannot build up enough charisma to make the material work in his favor.

The tone of the film overall is unsuccessful, taking itself too seriously to be camp and not pulling off enough drama to really be serious. The characters are sketches rather

than real people. The filmmakers make the mistake made in too many comic book adaptations, assuming that everyone who sees the film already knows and loves the characters. They never take the time to really delve into what makes them tick. The films that work on their own outside of the comic book world, such as "Spider-Man 2," "Hellboy" and the underrated "Hulk," create real characters on the screen, making no assumptions about what the audience knows.

The direction of "Constantine" is probably the biggest problem. This material has the potential to be interesting provided it possessed a little vision. Instead we are given a first-time director with too much music video experience. It ends up being nothing more than perfunctory, an entry on the résumé of a future Hollywood hack. The film ends up being just flashy enough to be diverting — no small change in this otherwise drab cinema season — but it's all empty calories and meaningless style.

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## Lichty: Appeal rooted in looks, money

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Simpson or her kid sister, Ashlee. I've never understood how either of them have any sort of appeal, both in looks and in song. Jessica, for instance, was a singer before "Newlyweds." How many people had heard of her? I think maybe 17. But then an MTV show came along and thrust her into the spotlight. What is Jessica's draw? She's stupid. What a way to make millions of dollars — by exploiting how completely brainless she is. That's not talent. But hey, at least Jessica doesn't lip sync (although I would advise her not to sing at all), unlike ...

The younger Simpson. Ashlee had really good potential to be the anti-Jessica, with her dark locks and slightly prettier voice, but she blew it early on. After Ashlee's October stunt on "Saturday Night Live," she should have been kicked out of the music business. There's no talent in mouthing words to a bad song. And to make matters even worse, she never took responsibility for her actions.

Ashlee told Us Weekly: "I grew up in a family that loves each other, so you just don't realize how cruel and critical people can be when you've done nothing wrong." Sad to say, many youngsters in "the business" don't view lip-synching as wrong, but

it is. Watching the Grammys this year, I was blown away by the skills of Alicia Keys. She has true talent and was obviously singing live, but it's something she shouldn't have to be applauded for — it's just the way things should be. But Ashlee isn't the only lip-syncher on the teen scene ...

Lindsay Lohan's appearance on "Good Morning America," just weeks after Ashlee's stinky stint on "SNL," was overshadowed by viewers' complaints that Lohan was obviously not singing live. One viewer said she did "a woeful job of lip-synching her way through two mind-numbingly generic Britney Spears/Ashlee Simpson cast-offs," adding, "She looked like she hadn't even bothered to learn the songs properly."

On the acting front, "Mean Girls" did well for Lohan's career, but how hard was that role? Look at Scarlett Johansson. Just two years Lohan's senior, Johansson is already getting nominated for countless awards, proving that being young doesn't mean good roles aren't out there, although I'm sure it has a lot to do with Johansson's much better acting skills. Like Lohan, another talentless "actress" choosing horribly bad roles is ...

Paris Hilton — she epitomizes the no-talent crowd of famous folks.

Sure, she lists her skills as acting (um ... "The Simple Life" isn't acting and neither is having sex on camera), singing (although she's better known for the feud with Hilary Duff's older sister, Haylie, about who gets to release the song "Screwed," which they both recorded) and — here's where the real talent comes in — modeling. Simply put, Paris is famous for being famous. She's rich, she's what some would consider beautiful and she gets whatever she wants. Anyone who saw her hosting "SNL" a few weeks ago could understand she can't play any other character but herself. Guess what? I can do that. Whoop-a-dee-do.

It's sad to say there are so many famous people in pop culture who are simply famous for being famous. That doesn't mean there is no talent in pop culture — Keys and Johansson aren't the only ones who give the showbiz industry some credit. But it's about time that we stopped celebrating and admiring these people who are good-looking, rich, but ultimately ordinary people with ordinary talents. But hey, this is just my opinion. What is it about these people who have such appeal? E-mail me and let me know what you think.

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