

## MOVIES



## ПОЧВАТОВА

**Thriller:** *Halle Berry stars as Josie Potenza and Peter Greene stars as Cole, a stranger to whom she confides a wish that comes back to haunt her.*

## Stylish look can't save 'Rich Man's Wife'

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AP ARTS EDITOR

Worthy contenders in the Worst Movie of the Year sweepstakes, and Hollywood Pictures' "The Rich Man's Wife" rates as a 2-1 entry.

Supposedly a sexy excursion in murder and double-cross, the movie amounts to little more than a laughable flop, replete with cliché-challenged dialogue and plot elements that borrow from every film-noir movie as well as all thrillers involving spousal murder and life among the rich.

"The Rich Man's Wife" was written by Amy Holden Jones, who wrote the wonderful "Mystic Pizza." Then again, she also made her directorial debut with "Slumber Party Massacre" and wrote the unbelievable screenplay for "Indecent Proposal." (How many women would actually leave handsome, charming and rich Robert Redford for loser Woody Harmon?)

The movie opens as a flashback. Beautiful Josie Potenza (Halle Berry) sits in a police station, waives all her rights to silence and having an attorney (get real) and announces she wants "to tell the truth." How cute. So she tells us the story of how her wealthy, alcoholic, beer-belly husband Tony gets murdered.

On the surface, Josie appears

to lead a wonderful life. She lives in a gorgeous home in the Pacific Palisades, is surrounded by beautiful art, wears expensive jewelry and clothes, and can have anything she wants — except her husband's attention. Tony (Christopher McDonald) is a successful producer at a TV studio, and he's a womanizer. Josie, meanwhile, is having an affair with a British restaurateur, Jake (Clive Owen), in whose business Tony has invested. But Josie won't leave him, because she has a prenuptial agreement in which she gets nothing if she leaves Tony.

But Josie is a plucky gal. She decides to forgive Tony, try to make things better, and stick it out. "I love my husband," she says. "I love my life."

Tony, in his own sloppy way, also loves Josie. She persuades him to go away to the mountains with her for an intimate vacation. It all falls apart when Tony decides to rush back to his office. Josie, forlorn and angry, heads for the nearest bar where she meets a psycho named Cole (Peter Greene).

Against all good judgment, she agrees to have dinner with him and winds up telling him about her husband. Cole suggests that she hire him to kill Tony; Josie panics and demands that he drive her home. The ride is a trip through hell as Cole turns off his

headlights and speeds along a curvy mountain road. Once home, he tries to rape Josie and she pulls a gun on him, nicking him in the cheek.

Bad move. Cole murders Tony. He then visits Josie demanding \$30,000 or else he'll go to the police and tell them that she had hired him. Josie goes along with the demand and takes Jake into her confidence. Another bad move.

With a series of dumb decisions, predictable plots twists and totally unrealistic police procedure, "The Rich Man's Wife" tumbles to its logical conclusion. There's an ending that's supposed to be a surprise. But you can smell it a mile away.

"The Rich Man's Wife" has a stylish look and Berry is a beautiful adornment. But neither can save the movie.

A positive note to the filmmakers: It is good to see race isn't an issue in this movie. Josie is a role that could be filled by a white actress or black actress, as Berry is. Josie also could be European, Asian, Latin, Arab or African. Doesn't matter. And that's good.

"The Rich Man Wife" was produced by Roger Birnbaum and Julie Bergman Sender, with Jennifer Ogden as executive producer. The film is now playing at metro Detroit movie theaters.



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