

COVERAGE

TITLE: The Biscuit
AUTHOR: Jack Waz
GENRE: Comedy
ANALYST: Bernadette M Martinez
PERIOD: January 1998
LOCALE: Washington D.C.
DATE: 12/11/2020

LOGLINE: An elementary school teacher and her veteran husband try to sell nuclear codes to start a family as a secret service agent, a political aide, and a scriptwriter search for them to prevent a political scandal.

| | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor |
|-----------|-----------|------|------|------|
| Plot | | | X | |
| Character | | | | X |
| Dialogue | | | | X |
| Structure | | X | | |
| Concept | | | X | |

SYNOPSIS:

President BILL CLINTON arrives at a school to read a story to a class of kindergartners and meets the teacher, AMANDA DULLES. While using the class restroom, Clinton drops the biscuit, a black piece of plastic housing the nuclear identification codes. A student finds it and Amanda pockets it as she leaves for an appointment at a fertility clinic with her husband, TODD.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL SILVA arrives at the White House to trade Clinton's biscuit for new codes. NOVAK, a presidential aide, discovers Clinton as lost the biscuit. He pushes off Silva until the following day. Novak confides in Secret Service agent JAMES BRADSHAW that the biscuit is missing. Novack and Bradshaw obtain a presidential memo and fax it to the speech writers instead of the Attorney General. Assistant speech writer CASSIE KENT insists on joining them in the search. Novak and Bradshaw reluctantly agree.

At the clinic, Amanda and Todd learn Todd is sterile and they will be unable to conceive children naturally. The doctor tells them about invitro fertilization, but says it comes with a \$50,000 price tag. The couple is distraught. They go to a pawn shop to try and sell a Princess Diana Beanie Baby but are refused because it has a tear in it. Amanda asks about the biscuit. The pawn shop owner tells them what it is and says he has a contact if they want to sell it. The two discuss it as Amanda goes back to work. When she gets back, a student takes the biscuit from her purse before leaving for the day.

Novak, Bradshaw, and Cassie enter the classroom as Amanda leaves. They search for but do not find the biscuit. They get Amanda's address from another teacher at the school. They arrive at the Dulles's apartment to question her about a missing item. When they leave Amanda discovers the biscuit is no longer in her purse. The Dulles's head to a park to get the biscuit from the child Amanda believes took it. The three staffers question other White House staff looking for it.

Amanda and Todd go back to the pawn shop and are directed to the owner's contact, who directs them to embassy row to try and sell the codes to another country. No one is interested in buying them and the two return to the contact. He then directs them to a local Serbian crime lord, JEFF, at their request. The Dulles's meet with him at his nightclub and he is very interested in the codes. He demands Amanda go retrieve them and Todd stay with him while she does so, threatening to kill him if she doesn't.

One of the diplomats Amanda and Todd went to meets with Novak and tells him about the couple that tried to sell him the codes. Novak, Bradshaw, and Cassie meet her at her apartment. She asks for their help to rescue Todd. They concoct a plan to retrieve the codes and save Todd.

Back at the nightclub, they put their plan into motion. They almost get away when Jeff takes Amanda hostage and leads the ensemble in a high-speed chase that ends with his vehicle in the Potomac. The White House staffers get the codes and Todd finds a duffle bag of cash in Jeff's car that they will use to start their family. They agree that the whole ordeal never happened.

ANALYSIS/NOTES:

Plot

The plot is predictable and filled with unbelievable scenarios (even in 1998 no one could walk into a kindergarten classroom freely) but does get from point A to point B, albeit in the most predictable fashion possible. It's obvious where the codes are going to be found. It's obvious what the couple will choose to do when presented with a financial hurdle and an opportunity. It's also obvious that it will go south and be wrapped up nicely in the end with everyone getting what they want.

The timelines don't seem manageable in a day. Most schools start at 7:30-8:00 am. This one has a presidential visit, so we can assume the students have been there for at least an hour or two before he arrives. If we assume the earlier time, he arrives at 9:30 and would likely be there for no more than an hour. At this point, the press and staff depart, and Amanda prepares to leave for a doctor's appointment (at least 10:30am). She gets there by bus so we can easily assume at least half an hour of travel time (fertility clinics aren't usually near schools). She and her husband have the appointment, can travel back to their apartment, and go to the pawn shop before she arrives back at the school by bus for the final bell around 2:30. That timeline is exceptionally tight for the sole purpose of having the biscuit stolen by one child and having another give her a card that propels her toward motherhood. It also doesn't seem like something any rational person would do, no matter how dedicated they are to their job. Then in the same day, Amanda and Todd go back to the pawn shop, to another store, and get meetings with three ambassadors all before 5pm when government offices typically close. They stop at a diner, go home to stash the codes again, go back to the shop, to a nightclub/warehouse, back to the house to meet with the rest of the cast, and back to the nightclub which results in a car chase that ends in the Potomac river—which apparently goes unnoticed by any of the 702,000 people in D.C.

Characters

The main characters are all stereotypical, one-dimensional, caricatures of cliché personalities.

The protagonist, Novak, a single-minded dedicated workaholic, has no discernable arc in the story. We eventually see a bit of backstory about Novak's LGBTQ identity and the consequences along political party lines, but it feels incredibly forced and unnecessary to the plot. At no point is there any real character growth. He begins as determined to do anything necessary to protect the administration and ends the exact same way.

Likewise, Bradshaw and Cassie remain static clichés. Bradshaw seems to be the older, experienced, buffoon and Cassie the young, sassy, newcomer hungry to get ahead. They state they have goals (retirement and an office in the White House) and these things remain static. For being a main character in much of the scripts, Bradshaw has surprisingly little revealed about him and is portrayed closer to a bumbling agent rather than a 20-year veteran of the job. Cassie does not evolve to see a larger picture, to sacrifice any part of herself in the name of something greater; she is focused on what rectifying the problem can do for her.

Amanda and Todd begin as desperate idiots, decide to do anything for their chance at a family, and end up redeemed for deciding to do the right thing at the last minute once they were caught. Both are portrayed as “loveable idiots” without any depth. Their dedication to each other and want for children is what makes up the majority of both characters.

Dialogue

The dialogue is extremely dumbed down and very simplistic for a cast of characters in very specialized fields. It takes cheap, easy shots in its attempt to be funny.

The words “friggin” and “frickin” are used and stands out as an unnecessary stand in for an expletive where none is really needed. Phrases like “retarded sperm” have gone out of fashion and receive a great deal of backlash when used, for good reason.

Jeff’s dialogue is so stereotypical and overdone it becomes a racist portrayal of the character. Swagnanamous’s initial dialogue implies he is non-white (p. 57 “Man, you people watch one guy get beat up by the cops, now every white person wants to try it out.” p.58 “Tina, mind giving these two nice whites a ride over to embassy row?”) and if that is the case, he could come off as yet another stereotype.

Structure

We’re introduced to the main players almost immediately. The loss of the biscuit is the inciting incident. The following rising action brings Bradshaw and Cassie to the team and presents the Dulles’s with a financial dilemma. The first turning point has the Dulles’s deciding whether to sell the codes and humiliate the president or return them to the White House. The subsequent rising action has Novak, Bradshaw, and Cassie questioning Amanda and Todd about the biscuit and returning to the White House to question staff as Amanda and Todd go find Nathan to retrieve the biscuit. The midpoint montages work to convey the ineptitude of characters and to speed through conversations that would drag otherwise. The rising action introduces the Dulles’s to Swagnanamous and sets them on the road to selling the codes. The next turning point introduces Jeff as a potential buyer for the codes. The climax occurs at the nightclub and with car chase and the resolution follows where Novack gets the codes and the Dulles’ get a bag of cash.

Concept

The story concept is based on an incident revealed in the autobiography of General Hugh Shelton where the codes were missing for months before that fact was revealed to Pentagon staff. While the idea is strong, the execution leaves a lot to be desired. If this weren’t such a slapstick mockery with an abundance of unbelievable events and timelines, it could be stronger. The Clinton presidency is already overshadowed by his predecessors, who are all ripe with comedic possibilities, and this will likely fall flat with the target demographics for comedies. It’s an outdated topic with overly simplified characters portrayed in a tired manner. The “everyone’s incompetent” routine insults the characters in the film and the audience simultaneously by denying the actors and the viewers any real depth.

Format/Grammar/Spelling

There are some mechanical errors throughout the script including spelling, missing punctuation, and an incorrect character name for dialogue on page 84. On page 25 Novack and Bradshaw pinpoint a Waldman in the directory as a destination, but they are looking for Cassie Kent. There could be a connection, but it isn't stated in the script.

RECOMMENDATION:

PASS