

# 'Here on Earth' falls to mediocrity in end

By Samuel McKewon

Senior editor

"Here On Earth" meanders along for a while, a pleasant little movie, a drippy teen love story in the self-contained universe of God's perfect small town.

And that's fine; had it stayed the course and tossed in a few lines here and there that sounded reasonably romantic and well put together, the movie would have been sweet enough, albeit forgettable.

So I don't know what possessed the movie to take a 90-degree turn in the final 30 minutes, choosing an ending that is perfectly acceptable under some circumstances, but not in any way, shape or form here.

It is an ending that cannot occur logically. And I must explain the ending, or the review makes no sense, because the movie more or less changes its entire emotional viewpoint based upon it.

So if you don't want to know it, well, stop reading now.

The buildup is somewhat clever in "Here on Earth," a coming-of-age romance about a very rich boy, Kelley, (Chris Klein) and the merely middle-class, small-town girl Sam (Leelee Sobieski).

Kelley is not only rich, but a snob and smart to boot. And for his high school graduation, his corporate raider of a father (Stuart Wilson) offers him a sports car for joy riding.

Kelley and Co. speed into a nearby Massachusetts hamlet (though the movie was shot in Minnesota) and cruise into the local diner, where Kelley dishes the dirt with local "poor boys" and flirts with Sam, the waitress, whose boyfriend Jasper (Josh Hartnett) has to juice his testosterone by challenging Kelley to a car race all

## REVIEW HERE ON EARTH

**STARS:** Leelee Sobieski, Chris Klein  
**DIRECTOR:** Mark Piznarski  
**RATING:** PG-13 (language)  
**GRADE:** C-  
**FIVE WORDS:** Fine chemistry, but wayward ending.

over the countryside.

It eventually leads back to the diner, where the two cars crash and demolish the building. Kelley and Jasper have to rebuild the diner themselves during the summer. In the process, romance buds, and Jasper get jealous.

Klein and Sobieski have the requisite chemistry, and both have bigger screens ahead of them, especially Sobieski, who may be the next Meryl Streep and has an unforced acting style to prove it.

Klein, by virtue of nature, has an open-faced persona many young male leads lack today. They'll both age well.

There is some comfort in the movie's predictability, which asks Samantha to choose between the boys and Kelley to stand up to his dad's idea of the perfect future.

Much is made of poetry, romance and the forest near Sam's house. And I could've lived with any sort of ending along those sappy lines, including the cheap cliché where Kelley tells off daddy once and for all, leaving him the dark hallway. The whole movie was a cliché. But that ending, nor anything resembling it, ever comes.

Spoiler time.

Samantha reveals she has cancer and has, in fact, had cancer the entire time she has known Kelley. It started in her knee, apparently, though she tells Kelley she hurt it in a track meet. The can-



Chris Klein, Leelee Sobieski and Josh Hartnett star in "Here on Earth."

Courtesy photo

cer has spread. She will die. And then, she dies.

This ending completely defies reality. Even if Sam chose not to tell of her condition, wouldn't someone else? Was it the town secret? I assume not. How could Kelley go through months of interacting with people, none of whom drop the idea of cancer?

We know it not to be possible, and not only because screenwriter Mark Seitzman has established the majority of characters as good-hearted people who wouldn't do such a thing. What of Jasper's hopes of his and Sam's building a life

together? In the movie neither consider that, well, she's not going to live for any of their plans.

"Here On Earth" shifts into overdrive, becoming an entirely different experience in its final moments. It is not particularly sad, nor could it be, because the shift has no fair warning. Why, for any reason, would we assume Samantha is lying about the knee injury? The obtuseness of the movie is astounding.

This is an ending that has nothing - nothing at all - to do with the first half. And so "Here on Earth" sinks despite heavenly intentions.

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