

Gibson's *Air America* never gets off ground

by T. J. Gillespie

Air America
directed by Roger Spottiswoode
produced by Tri-Star Pictures

(Dateline: Toronto, Canada) No, this is not a top news story that just came over the wire service, though, to be honest, I wish it was. If *Air America* really did exist, and there was a close call involving heated moments on the runway, at least I would be able to provide you with a gripping interview from a petrified passenger.

But, guess what? There is absolutely nothing gripping about *Air America*, the new movie starring Mel Gibson and Robert Downey Jr.

Gibson and Downey portray Gene Ryack and Billy Covington, pilots who somehow get caught up in the absurdity known as *Air America*. The title refers to the CIA-operated airline that ran flights in and out of Southeast Asia in the early 1970s.



Mel Gibson and Robert Downey Jr. crash and burn as non-existent CIA pilots in *Air America*.

Of course, being the CIA, they didn't really exist! This is about the

stupidest premise I've ever heard of since the *Dallas* dream

sequence.

The movie starts off with what

appears to be a moment of sincerity, then slides right into dribble bottle humour and never returns. The plot opts for a story about the secret airline that will fly Anything. Anywhere. Anytime.

When Covington arrives in Laos to join the AA team, he gets paired with Ryack, this is, apparently, where the humour is supposed to begin. It doesn't. A few crashes, a couple of sleazy lounge singers, a stupid senator, a corrupt supervisor, a drug dealer and a little remorse are thrown together to try to hold your attention; but, in the end, *Air America* crashes and burns.

I have a feeling that this movie could have worked if it had steered a little more towards the sincere side instead of being a war comedy. The premise never got off the ground. It is quite obvious that all of the events are happening, but supposedly none of it exists, this becoming a convenient scapegoat for conscience.

It's awfully hard to believe that these pilots care about the wrong that they are doing when Gibson has amassed his own private stash of arms all around the country as his personal retirement nest-egg. If this story had been told from the point of view of characters who really didn't like what they were doing, but who followed orders, we might have seen the ugliness of war.

Air America has one funny moment in the epilogue. That's it. If you're at a theatre where it is playing, sneak in and catch the last three minutes, but no more; long term exposure to this film will have you begging for an *Air America* barf bag.

Tri-Star should have left this one in the hangar.

Emilio Estevez succeeds in creating garbage film

by Simon Chung

Men at Work
directed by Emilio Estevez
produced by Epic Films

Four years ago, a cinematic turkey called *Wisdom* was released to justly deserved critical damnation and box office indifference, and quickly relegated to the dusty corners of your neighbourhood video store.

The irrepressible writer/director/star of that fiasco was none other than Emilio Estevez, who, because of his dubious star status, has managed to convince studio moguls to put up another \$10 million for his next venture. *Men at Work*, starring the auteur himself, as well as his brother with a different last name, Charlie Sheen, is currently playing at a theatre near you.

Don't count on it being there for long.

The plot, which makes no sense at all, has something to do with a couple of California garbage men (Estevez and Sheen) foiling an evil industrialist's (John Getz) scheme to dump toxic waste into the ocean.

The holes in the story are big enough to drive a garbage truck through. Why, for example, would the rich and powerful industrialist stoop to personally supervising the dumping of chemical waste every night? Does he not have assistants?

The most disturbing aspects of *Men at Work*, however, are not its silliness or illogic, but its racism, sexism and homophobia. Consider a film in which:

- a black character is portrayed as a crazy, violent ex-convict who has an irrational hatred for police. As the film unfolds, he racks up about 30 years to life's worth of federal offenses, including kidnapping and attempted murder.

The plot ineffectively tries to explain his behaviour by suggesting that he is a Vietnam vet. In one (unintentionally) hilarious scene, the character has a flashback and imagines the people around him are Vietnamese peasants. The image he sees is that of people in pointed straw hats nonchalantly eating out of little cardboard Chinese take-out boxes!

The question I kept asking myself was whether the character would make as much sense if it had been played by a Caucasian. It appears to me that, right from the start, the film makes a connection between the character's blackness and his criminal nature. As such, it is guilty of perpetuating a racist stereotype.

- a female character (Leslie Hope) who functions solely as Charlie Sheen's love interest, invites his character, a complete stranger, into her apartment. For no apparent reason (other than the fulfilment of writer/Estevez' masturbatory fantasy), she offers him Dom Perignon and lets him feel her head, before throwing herself sexually at him.

- a recurring "comic" image involves two almost naked men being tied front to back in a whirlabout. The audience is invited to laugh at the two (presumably heterosexual) men as they try to free themselves by twisting and wriggling about in gross parody of

homosexual copulation.

Even if one disregards the film's ideology and judges it on its own terms, the fact remains that *Men at Work* is completely unsatisfactory. Estevez has absolutely no idea of how to make a scene suspenseful or comic, and the film is supposed to be both.

In one scene, clearly stolen from Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, Estevez has Sheen go into Hope's apartment to look for evidence while he watches from a window across the street. Whereas, the scene in *Rear Window* has the audience sitting on the edge of its seats at the same time as they are grinning from ear to ear at the dia-

logue, the one in *Men at Work* does neither. For one thing, it has already been disclosed earlier on that Hope is not the murderer, so the whole scene falls completely flat; it's about as suspenseful as the average episode of *Three's Company*, and half as funny (which is saying a lot).

Given the deplorable ideological stance of *Men at Work* (even its alleged environmentalism seemed superficial and unconvincing) and its directorial ineptitude, let's hope that this will be the last we'll hear from Emilio Estevez, writer... director... star, except, perhaps, for the occasional glimpse on video store shelves.

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