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Captain “Whip” Whittaker wakes up, inhales a line of cocaine, stumbles over countless bottles of liquor and beer and makes it to the airport in time to make another alcoholic beverage and fly a passenger jet to Atlanta, he also winds up saving the lives of 96 out of 102 people onboard.

Such is the life of Whittaker (**Denzel Washington**) in “Flight,” the latest film from Director **Robert Zemeckis**
, which is absolutely one of the best of the year. The entirety of its success is built on Washington giving one of the best performances of his career.

When the plane goes down (which is obvious in the previews, if you’ve seen them), Whittaker is a hero for saving all but six people onboard as he miraculously crash-lands the plane in a field after a massive mechanical failure.

But when the investigation into the crash begins, Whittaker is forced to face his alcoholism and drug addiction. He hides from interviews and the public eye while they call him a hero, but the fact that his blood-alcohol level was 0.28, would land him in prison for years.

Enter cutthroat and intelligent attorney Hugh Lang (**Don Cheadle**), who is hired by a pilots’ union to make sure Whittaker does not go to jail and the union’s reputation is not ruined. Cheadle is able to hold his own on screen with Washington, and exudes charisma and bravado that is only eclipsed by Washington’s.

After declaring, “My clients don’t go to jail,” Lang sets his plan in motion to make sure Whittaker avoids any and all blame in the crash investigation. The film, and Whittaker, make the case that despite his drug and alcohol use, no one could have landed the plane the way Whittaker managed to do and save the majority of the passengers.

Lang even notes that when investigating the crash, 10 pilots were placed in simulators to try and recreate the events and not a single one managed to save a single person onboard.

But Whittaker isn’t a good person. After meeting a recovering addict, Nicole (**Kelly Reilly**) in the hospital following the crash, he tilts back and forth between throwing out all of his booze, to drowning in an unbelievable amount of alcohol.

She is determined to overcome her drug addiction, takes all the necessary steps and surrounds herself with support, while Whittaker falls further and further into the dark and his life careens out of control.

The climax comes with an attempt to sober up before a federal hearing, and his actions leading up to it would spoil the phenomenal ending. But Washington puts all of his skill and heart into the role, balancing between agonizing pain and sadness to a confidence and swagger that somehow, finds you rooting for the guy.

I don’t think anyone outside of Washington could pull that off.

Credit must also be given to the outstanding work of screenwriter **John Gatins**, who put the Whittaker character on paper and gave Washington a great template to work with and expand and flesh out the character.

Of course the film is about the “flight” that is the starting point of all its events, but the fact that Whittaker flees from his addictions and refuses to acknowledge the fact they are destroying his life is the true meaning of the title for me.

Whittaker takes “flight” from responsibility, he tried to get flight attendants to lie about his condition that day, and his whole defense lies in the fact that he was not impaired in any way. I won’t say whether that denial and “flight” continues, but you want to see him get better and change.

“Flight” is a fascinating film and Washington will undoubtedly be named alongside **Daniel Day-Lewis**
and
Phillip Seymour Hoffman
as possibilities for the Best Actor in a Leading Role Academy Award.

I will warn anyone going to see the film to take the ‘R’ rating very seriously as there is no shortage of drug usage, foul language and adult content.

“Flight” is rated R and is now playing in local theaters with a runtime of 138 minutes.

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