

Film Review: Denzel Washington Pilots Nearly Flawless 'Flight'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 1, 2012 - 8:55am

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CHICAGO – Few films have more deftly walked the tightrope through a moral gray area than Robert Zemeckis' stunning "Flight," one of the best dramas of the year that also just happens to include the best performance from two-time Oscar winner Denzel Washington in the last decade. Reminding us what he can do with a deep, complex character, Washington completely embodies the soul of a man dealing with a life crash long after he's no longer in the cockpit of an actual plane. Working from an Oscar-worthy script by John Gatins, Zemeckis & Washington work together to deliver an adult-oriented drama that is so consistently entertaining and fascinating that it plays like a thriller even if the thrills aren't produced from traditional devices but from the sense that you're watching masters at work.



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Whip Whitaker (Denzel Washington) is not a good guy. If you knew he was your pilot and knew his background, you wouldn't get on his plane. He's been a pilot for so long that he can do it in his sleep. And he's been an alcoholic and drug addict for even longer. "Flight" opens in a personality-less hotel room as Whip wakes up alongside a naked flight attendant named Katerina (Nadine Velazquez), downs the backwash left in a cheap beer bottle, does a couple of lines of cocaine, and dons his pilot gear. He's got a plane to fly.



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It turns out that today is *that day* for Whip – the day that everything changes. Everything seems just fine at first, especially after Whip pilots the crew, which includes Katerina, through a horrendous storm. He leaves the duties to co-pilot Ken (Brian Geraghty) and downs a few celebratory bottles of vodka before taking a nap in his cockpit. Things go wrong when it's time to land and a mechanical error sends the plane plummeting to the ground. Whip thinks quickly and pulls off a miracle landing that involves inverting the plane to try and slow its descent. A few souls are lost on the way to safety but Whip is generally considered a life-saving hero. Until the toxicology report comes back.

And that's just the beginning of "Flight." After Whip crashes, he faces some important figures in his life, including another recovering addict named Nicole (Kelly Reilly), an attorney tasked with keeping Whip out of jail named Hugh Lang (Don Cheadle), and a representative from the Pilots Union named Charlie Anderson (Bruce Greenwood), an old friend who isn't sure what should happen to Whip. You won't be either. "Flight" is a daringly complex drama in the way Gatins and Zemeckis refuse to spoon-feed answers to their audience. Should Whip be put on a pedestal for saving more lives than, we're told, nearly any other pilot in the world would have been able to save? Would he have saved them all if he wasn't drunk? Should he go to jail? "Flight" never gives viewers a clean set of answers to these questions, leaving them open for discussion throughout and even after the credits.



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"Flight" stars Denzel Washington, Kelly Reilly, Don Cheadle, Bruce Greenwood, and John Goodman. It was written by John Gatins and directed by Robert Zemeckis. It opens on November 2, 2012.



Flight

Photo credit: Paramount

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