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CINEMA

A Flash of Green

Review by Michael Sussman

Written and directed by Victor Nunez; starring Ed Harris, Blair Brown, and Richard Jordan.

A Flash of Green is, at heart, the story of one man's conscience. From the time he is seduced by corrupt powers, through his gradual change in consciousness, to the outcome of his personal, quiet struggle, we witness this man's chosen course. His passage is not simple.

The more obvious conflict of the film concerns a political battle. Opposing sides are marshaling forces around a western Florida bay. Conservationists want to keep it as is. Local businessmen want to put in a housing development. It's not the first time this battle has been fought. But now, with a poor economy and a shortage of jobs, the opposition will be fierce.

Leading the developers, at least covertly, is County Commissioner Elmo Bliss (Richard Jordan). Bliss is interested in more than homes, though. He intends to use the project as fodder for statewide ambitions. Although success is probable, Bliss wants total assurance, and to get this he needs to silence the environmental resistance. He calls in a little help.

Jimmy Wing (Ed Harris) is a nice guy, well-known, well-liked, good at his job, respected. As a reporter for the local paper, he is constantly writing up two-bit news. Despite Wing's private frustrations—his wife's permanent hospitalization, his platonic closeness to his best friend's widow—he appears to be stable and content with life. In short, Wing is a basically good man. Yet, when he is invited into Bliss's backroom office, he gives in to the tactics of seduction.

Wing's motivations are never explicit. It is too easy to assume that he opts to betray his friends out of desire for the currency



Blair Brown and Ed Harris star in the movie "A Flash of Green."

flushed before him. Perhaps he is also lured by a sense of adventure. Or maybe he hopes to ride upon the coattails of Bliss's power. There is a complexity to the man, and he keeps it to himself.

Ed Harris maintains a low-key performance as the wavering Jimmy Wing. He shows no malice in treachery, nor excess in affection. His paid informant is just as reserved as his affable neighbor and pal. Wing may be easy to like, but he is never easy to know, and the time and manner of his change in conduct is difficult to predict.

The script, based on a novel by John D. MacDonald, builds its tension around the man Jimmy Wing. When Bliss's tactics strike

too close, when the political results are assured, then the story becomes fully and rightly Wing's, as he turns his course toward salvation. It is a sort of spiritual renewal for him.

A Flash of Green works very well in its straightforward, sparing way. Scenes linger when appropriate to reveal character. They are brief when a quick point is made. This is not a film with flourish and dazzle, but a work of gentle persuasion. The acting, cinematography, and soundtrack are excellent. The direction allows them to be so. I recommend this film both for what it says and for how it happens to say it.

—Michael Sussman

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Guide to Local Arts,
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Published Every Thursday

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Distribution
Daybreak News Co.

Typesetting
ProtoType

Camera Work
Chimera & Company

Printing
Springfield News

335 West 20th Avenue
Eugene, Oregon 97405
(503) 484-0519
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