

UP IN THE AIR

US, 2009, Jason Reitman



Up in the Air can mean that something is uncertain – and the central character of this light drama with serious overtones finds that his life and choices are up in the air. But, he is also up in the air, literally, as he strives to clock up ten million air miles (on American Airlines which get lots of publicity throughout). He is continually on the move around the US from his home and his company base in Omaha, Nebraska, feeling at home in airports and familiar with their check-in rituals, security rituals and boarding rituals (although he does a double take as the flight attendant seems to ask him, 'Cancer?' but she is offering him a soft drink, 'Can, sir?').



The reason he is up in the air is that his job is one that has been on the rise in recent years. His company sends him out to do a dirty job for companies, firing their employees. Through the film there are collages of disbelieving Americans, the whole range of gender, ethnic background, social status, facing being fired – and a whole range of responses from resignation to despair and threatening suicide. The company tries a soft sell (but relentless) manner which many see through. They are also offered a folder with severance terms, presented as if this was the greatest opportunity for a new life.

This expert in dismissal is Ryan Bingham (George Clooney in an Oscar-nominated performance). He picks up women as he travels. Commitment is not one of his characteristics. The film shows one relationship with a travelling businesswoman (Vera Farmiga, Oscar-nominated) which has its moments and an unexpected comeuppance. He also has a most resolute, theory-bound trainee (Anna Kendrick, Oscar-nominated) who tries to be relentless though her inexperience in dealing with people is shown up.

In the meantime, he visits his sister in Wisconsin for her daughter's wedding and has to pep the groom who is getting cold feet.

It is a perfectly ordinary drama with characters well-drawn and something to reflect on both about human nature and the current economic situation. But the reasons for its Oscar nominations, which also include Best Picture, Director and Adapted Screenplay, elude this reviewer.