

Ending ruins otherwise smooth 'Road'

BY SAMUEL MCKEWN
Editor

The climax to "Arlington Road" reminded me of the talking villain in one of the overheated action thrillers. Just before they kill the hero, they feel compelled to reveal far too much, wait too long and get killed themselves.

This movie feels the same way. Its ending determines much of how you see the film, which is a tense romp through the field of paranoia and domestic terrorism up until the final 20 minutes. Then, instead of going for a conventional, showdown-style ending (which could have worked), screenwriter Ehren Kruger opts for a trick akin to one huge movie-long mirage, which could have worked too, if the movie didn't then proceed to reveal how clever it thinks it is.

It's a shame, because only a odd, everything-was-just-an-illusion twist could have ruined what was a satisfying buildup, focused on ideas rather than pointless, big explosions. "Arlington Road" starts off with a jolt, as George Washington history professor Michael Faraday (Jeff Bridges) is driving home to Reston, Va. home and finds a boy (Mason Gamble) dripping with blood in the street, his hand damaged.

It's hours later at the hospital that Faraday meets the boy's parents Oliver and Cheryl Lang (Tim Robbins and Joan Cusack), who happen to live across the street from Faraday. Not long after, Faraday and his girlfriend (Hope Davis) are at the Lang's home; Faraday even confides secrets about his dead wife, who died in the line of duty with the FBI, to his neighbors.

Film Review

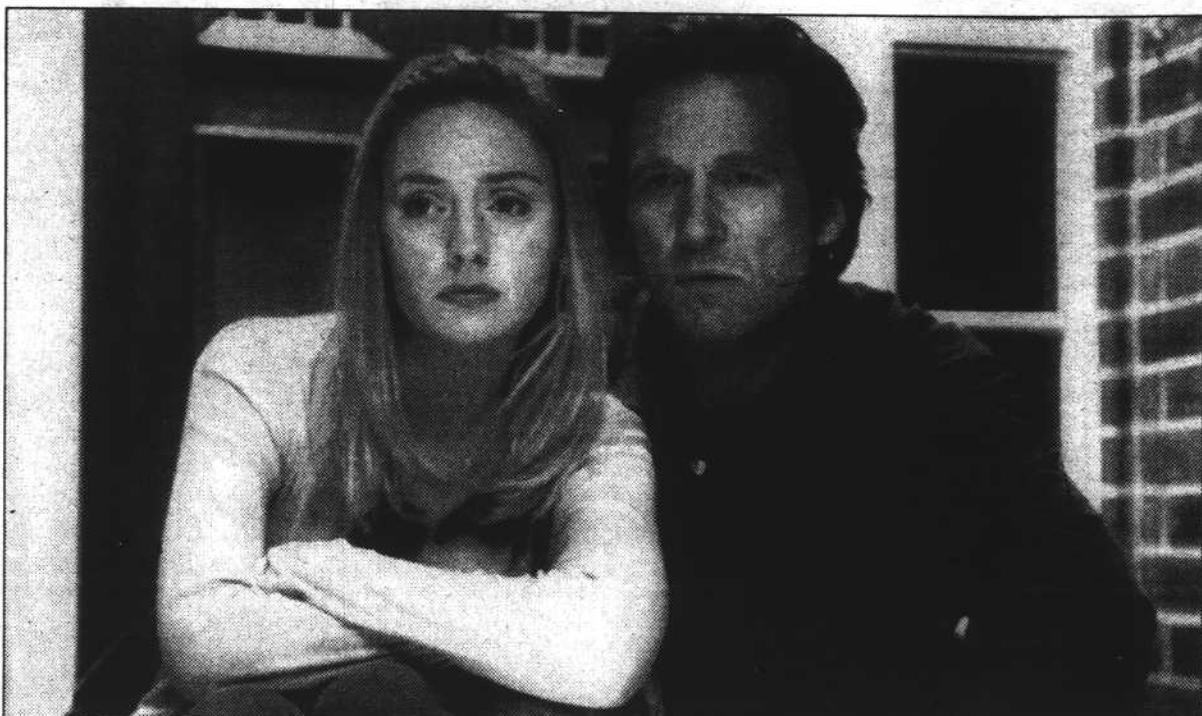
The Facts

Title: "Arlington Road"
Stars: Jeff Bridges, Tim Robbins
Director: Mark Pellington
Rating: R (adult language, terrorist violence)
Running Time: 117 minutes (1:57)
Grade: C
Five Words: Laughable ending kills satisfying buildup

Faraday is no regular professor, but one who teaches courses on terrorism and shock of all shocks, he begins to suspect that Oliver Lang is one himself. He becomes sure of it where he looks into the Lang's past. Robbins, in a performance that isn't one of his more memorable, still creates an uneasiness about his character that contributes to the herky-jerky atmosphere director (and MTV vet) Mark Pellington creates.

From there, it's a heated search for the truth and an avalanche of coincidences (exactly how did those envelopes end up in Faraday's mailbox?), with Bridges screwing his maw into all kinds of contortions of disbelief and fear. It's a trademark of Bridges' acting, and it works here, too, although, in retrospect, the movie might have been better had he and Robbins reversed roles. In supporting work, Cusack and Davis service the plot well.

But whatever foundation the movie creates is shaken to its core by the ending, which asks you to rethink everything, and I mean everything, that's been seen up to that point. The last five minutes of "Arlington Road", which



COURTESY PHOTO
JEFF BRIDGES plays Michael Faraday, a professor who believes his neighbors are terrorists, and Hope Davis plays the woman who loves him in "Arlington Road."

comes after the actual, tremendously downbeat ending of the movie, destroys the audience's thought process by giving an exact answer to Lang's entire terrorist plot. And I believe the entire plot could have worked, had it not been handled with such obvious foolishness in its final details.

It isn't possible, for example, to guarantee the exact every move one man will make; that he will go to a certain phone, that he will search out the

true identity of the terrorist, that he won't talk to the FBI even though that would be the obvious way to stop everything. It is even more impossible to predict the actions of those who come in contact with that man and allow him to seal the fate of all involved.

In retrospect, one sees the Lang character as a man both incredibly lucky and stupid. Had "Arlington Road" not felt so compelled to tack on its epilogue, there could have been some spirited

debate and how what happened *actually* happened, sort of in the vein of "12 Monkeys."

Instead, we are left with a movie that asks a few decent questions of modern-day terrorism and law enforcement, and then answers those questions in a way that conjures up thoughts of astrology rather than logic. The planets must have been aligned the day some Hollywood executive green-lighted "Arlington Road's" preposterous denouement.

Coconut Bay offers up island atmosphere in city

■ Landlocked Lincolnites have a new place to go for Caribbean flavor, even if it is a bit over-the-top.

BY J.J. HARDER
Staff Writer

If you can't afford a ticket to see Jimmy Buffett this summer, then shell out two bucks and swim into Coconut Bay.

The two clams are for the cover, a good value for an evening of food and fun at Lincoln's new island paradise of a restaurant/bar.

Coconut Bay, 9th & Capitol Parkway, provides a Caribbean atmosphere in the middle of Nebraska. Not a waitress can be found without a Hawaiian shirt and not a drink is blended without a palm tree ornament in each glass. But from the fake aquarium above the bar to the blinding South Beach colors of the walls, Coconut Bay is a bit of a tacky

tropical vacation.

And if the decorations aren't gaudy enough, the menu is definitely over the top. The Bay offers a variety of the standard fried or grilled bar foods, but tries to give them an island twist. For instance, a regular burger is called the Ocho Rios Beach Burger. Sounds very tropical, but tastes just like a burger at Barry's. This type of exaggerated, over-hyped entree-naming litters the menu.

But the selection is wide enough to overcome the cheesy naming shtick. Most of the appetizers are definitely appealing, especially the breaded mushrooms and chicken tenders. A number of salads are available, along with a good number of chicken and steak dishes, all from \$5-10. The Jerk Chicken is probably the most authentic of entrees, but probably no more coastal than your average chicken sandwich off the backyard grill.

And for a restaurant that has the word "Bay" in it, I would expect a large number of seafood dishes. About all this Bay establishment is a breaded shrimp appetizer and a

"Catch of the Day." But it's hard to expect good seafood 1000 miles inward from the coast. Even Charlie's and Inn Harms Way do only a mediocre job with fish, so we'll have to cut Coconut Bay a little break.

The one area in which the Bay does do the islands justice is in its drink specials. A list of 12 \$3 frozen drinks should allow even the most down-home of Nebraska cowboys to venture out a little bit. And the Bay adds just a dash of coconut to each drink to give them a distinct flavor.

On the food and drinks alone, Coconut Bay shouldn't make you want to call for reservations. But the one thing that should make you want to give it a try is the Jimmy Mack Show. As the Bay's version of entertainment, Jimmy Mack is pretty much a DJ with a microphone, singing beach standards - Margaritaville, Copa Cabana, etc. He's a middle-aged cheeseball with maracas that makes people want to make fools of themselves on the dance floor.

I guess he's close enough to Jimmy Buffett, and Coconut Bay is close enough to the coast.

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