

Audiences are betrayed by Costa-Gavras' latest

★ *Betrayed*
Plaza

Sometimes, a movie just doesn't work. We send it away with a shrug and a sigh. But, more often than not, a movie is as easy to pick off as a duck in a shooting gallery.

Betrayed is a duck — a squawking, flat-footed duck — and even a four year old could tear it apart. If director Costa-Gavras notices a certain glee in the criticism his latest film is receiving, he's probably right. A sanctimonious failure is much more fun to dissect than a silly one.

We love to catch our preachers with their pants down, and Costa-Gavras is as close to a preacher as the movies have. He has specialized in politically charged, highly polemical films such as *Z* and *Missing*, tackling in the process such weighty topics as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and U.S. involvement in South America.

Perhaps *Betrayed* stumbles because the target he has chosen is such an easy one. That target is white-supremacist groups, and he examines them in a story about a young FBI agent (Debra Winger) who goes undercover to in-

filtrate one such organization, only to find herself falling in love with the leader.

This is a potentially explosive premise and Costa-Gavras tries to paint a complex portrait of betrayal on every level, including an FBI just as ruthless in obtaining its goals as the racist factions it is investigating. We should leave the theater with our heads spinning with questions of loyalty: Loyalty to what? Loyalty for whom?

Instead, we leave with much more mundane problems. Why would the FBI send an inexperienced — and rather incompetent — agent on such a sensitive

and dangerous assignment? Why would they keep an undercover agent waiting at a meeting place for two and a half hours — risking years of work, not to mention her life? Why would that same agent throw caution to the wind and confide her true feelings to a young child?

Quite simply, *Betrayed* doesn't work because we're on the director's side from the very beginning. Costa-Gavras is much better at arguing with audiences than entertaining them.

By Michael Giltz

