



MASTERMATH® REVIEWS ... *SELF MEDICATED*

Sometimes you're just in the right place at the right time. (cf. my chance encounter with Flyerman at the 2002 CineVegas.) With a couple hours to kill before my flight out this year, I walked up to two women with Filmmaker badges milling about the Brenden theatres and asked them which film was theirs. They replied that they were publicists for *Self Medicated* (which was showing soon) and was I going to see it (I hadn't planned on doing so). While I was hemming and hawing about, the director walked up and asked the same question. Hey, what was I gonna say, no? I am *so* glad I said yes.

First off, let me state that this is a story based on true events. But not in the usual sense, that of films which go far afield from the truth. No. What happens to the character Andrew Eriksen herein actually happened to native Las Vegas writer / director / lead actor Monty Lapica in real life, who made the film partly as a way of dealing with his father's death. His mother, who attended the premiere, really did have him kidnapped and whisked away to a "facility" to straighten him out. I liked the way in the opening credits that the casinos faded into and out of focus. I imagined that was symptomatic of Andrew's state of mind, and correctly so.

In the film, when his mother Louise (Diane Venora) gets a call in the middle of the night to come pick him up, she isn't terribly surprised and doesn't need directions to the county jail. At 17, he's into drugs, booze and fake ids in a major way. The half dozen pill bottles on her night stand tell how she copes with the problem child. But those are OK, since they're prescription drugs. Yeah right.

Andrew is a fun person to hang out with, no matter what the context—school, cruising The Strip, anywhere. He's always upbeat, even when he shouldn't be. He's extremely adept at getting out of bad situations—he just doesn't know how to avoid them.

Nicole (Kristina Anapau) is Andrew's better half. *Way* better. She tells him they'll always be best friends, no matter what. Then they get into a huge fight and Andrew casts her aside, as he has everything else good in his life.

Then comes the night the van arrives at his house, the one his mother arranged to take him to Brightway to fix his lack of "coping skills." While he's being dragged off kicking and screaming and calling his mother a bitch, one of the attendants says, "It's going to be all right." Yeah, somehow I don't think so.

When the van is speeding through the Nevada desert in the middle of the night, Andrew is once again not in control of what's happening. Only this time, he *knows* it.

At the facility, we meet head counselor Dan (Michael Bowen), counselor Keith (Greg Germann, of *Ally McBeal* fame) and Dr. Reinholtz (Michael Mantell), who proceed to systematically make Andrew's life a living hell. I guess it doesn't matter that you max out the IQ tests if you don't play well with others.

Andrew learns fast what happens when you use profanity. Other residents include his roommate, Mike, who writes letters home in Korean so they can't be read by the staff; and Tori, who claims 15 isn't too young to be a sex addict and who has *severe* stepdad issues—when asked to show her sanctuary, draws a gun, which she would use to blow his you-know-what off. Andrew's sanctuary is Mr. Winkle, a clown-like imaginary friend who's always sitting on his shoulder and who apparently wasn't paying attention during the anti-profanity lecture.

In group—and anytime else, really—Andrew likes talking about anything other than what's wrong with him. Keith tries to get him to see that, and fails. Based on his test results, Andrew is put on anti-depressants, standard fare in this place. Then one day in group, he goes too far, commits a 223. What's that? Well, let's just say the solution involves a syringe.

Meanwhile, at the family home, things are tough on Louise as well. Not only does she have to live with knowing she sent her son away, for the first time in her life, she is now utterly alone.

Back at the facility, Andrew plots his escape. Once back home, he patches things up to a degree with Nicole, who pleads with him to apply himself to the things that are wrong in his life. But he's not out of the woods yet. Not by a race and sports book long shot. He's too smart for his own good. *Way* too much. He has an answer for everything, except for what's wrong with him.

It isn't until he meets someone with less than him, a homeless man, that Andrew realizes that *most* people have less than he does. And finally, he decides to change.

Lapica displays a master's touch, despite this being his first time on either side of the camera. The plot here is similar to that of numerous other films, but Lapica makes you *feel* it. Watching it makes me glad *I* didn't grow up here. Despite the severity and seriousness of the subject matter (or perhaps because of it), Lapica always knows just when to insert a lighter moment or line.

Let me tell you, it isn't easy to create the thrill of a car chase when there's only one car, or to impart critical significance to a mere paper clip, but Lapica pulls it off. Even a full moon in a black sky is vivid in its myriad unseen colours. The bottom line is that when you're on the top of the world, partying with your friends on the roof of a Las Vegas casino, you are usually very far from heaven indeed..

In the Q&A session which followed the film, Lapica said he actually was expelled from high school. It was funny walking the halls with his ex-principal, discussing which rooms would be best for filming.

He said the most difficult part of the film was writing the script. He added, "One item I have [of advice] is don't give up on troubled kids."

The main impetus for the film was to expose the corporations that run these facilities. The one he was housed at shut down before filming began due to the investigative reporting of others, but that company still has operations overseas. Such places are unlicensed and unregulated; kids actually die there. He survived and the world's a better place because of it.

Self Medicated [world premiere], 104 mins. Director/Writer, Monty Lapica. www.selfmedicated.com.

