

## Telling Lies in America

Joe Eszterhas is a big-bucks screenwriter who earned millions for slick trash (like *Flashdance* and *Basic Instinct*) and total trash (*Jade*, *Showgirls*) but who now has returned to his roots with his latest script. Very different from his previous efforts is *Telling Lies to America*, a coming of age story about a Hungarian immigrant kid growing up poor and ambitious in Cleveland (Eszterhas' hometown), in the early 1960's era of burgeoning rock n' roll.

The kid is teenager Karchy Jonas (Brad Renfro), an outsider at his high school who still has trouble pronouncing that tough "th" of English and who has to work nights at an egg plant to help support his factory worker father (Maximilian Schell). Karchy has an inchoate desire for a better life and grabs his chance when a local celebrity, slick disc jockey Billy Magic (Kevin Bacon) takes him on as a go-fer. Billy, willing to plug teenybopper tunes for dough, really loves rhythm and blues (what he calls "sweaty collars and dirty fingernails music"), and he humors Karchy because he recognizes his own deceitful youth in the lad.

In a new cool jacket, Karchy dreams of being a dj himself, complete with the girls, the hot car, and the flash he sees Billy possesses. His newfound hustle, however, loses him the respect of his old-country father and his co-worker and girlfriend Diney (Calista Flockhart), and, when he gets mired in Billy's payola schemes as a material witness for government investigators, he learns the price of prevaricating to get ahead.

If this sounds like a moral fable, it is--made watchable mostly by the easy and natural acting of the two leads. Renfro, lauded for his efforts in *The Client* and *Sleepers*, scores again as a restive adolescent, willing to lie in his desperation to be accepted while clinging to a core of decency. Bacon, one of our most versatile film actors, is again superb as Billy Magic. He limns a character who is all false front and bravado, yet who knows his superficial life is barren, a con who is shady but not truly evil.

Eszterhas's script, directed by newcomer Guy Ferland, seems a labor of love, crafted to develop character, not glitz. He should try it more often.

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