

## Australian Noir Hit ‘The Square’ is Riveting Directorial Debut

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 30, 2010 - 8:45am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – A spectacular alternative to the glut of blockbusters about to dominate the marketplace, Nash Edgerton’s “The Square” heralds the arrival of a major new talent on the international movie scene. A riveting tale of a small group of people doing very bad (and pretty dumb) things, “The Square” works from beginning to end and stands as one of the best feature debuts of the year to date.

Edgerton is hardly new to the world of filmmaking, having worked on the stunts for dozens of major Hollywood films, appeared as an actor in several of them, and worked as a short feature director. Working from a story idea and a script co-written by his brother Joel, Edgerton has synthesized his years of moviemaking experience into a piece of work that has drawn notable comparisons to the first film of another pair of brothers: Joel & Ethan Coen’s “Blood Simple”. “The Square” may not be quite as perfectly wound as that modern masterpiece of its genre but it’s easy to see why the connection has been made by critics. If this is as important a debut as the one that gave the Coens to the world only time will tell.



The Square

*Photo credit: Apparition*

“The Square” was a hit in its native Australia when it was released almost two years ago. With this release and next week’s long-delayed release of the great Korean film “The Good The Bad The Weird,” one is reminded how unusually long it takes even the best international films to get to the United States. Whatever took so long, it was worth the wait.

As with any noir, “The Square” features relatively average people torn apart by greed and desire. As in most thrillers, protagonists leading sinful lives rarely come out smelling like roses. So, when the film opens with “hero” Raymond Yale (David Roberts) having extramarital sex in

a parked car and then, moments later, accepting a kickback for a construction job he’s managing, it’s pretty transparent that poor Ray is about to have a number of very bad days.



The Square

*Photo credit: Apparition*

The object of Ray’s aforementioned car canoodling is Carla (Claire van der Boom), a beautiful, young, and also-married neighbor in Ray’s small town. Carla is stuck with a petty criminal named Smithy (Anthony Hayes), but she’s been working on an escape plan for her and Ray. When she spots a bag full of bloody money from one of her husband’s recent illegal activities, she decides it’s time to make a run for it. She and Ray will steal the money and live happily ever after.

Of course, the only way for the money to go missing and Smithy not get suspicious is for him to think it was burned up in a fire. So, Ray hires a local tough named Billy (co-writer and bro-of-the-director Joel Edgerton) to do the dirty deed for cheap while everyone is away at a Christmas celebration. Of course, things don’t go exactly as planned and Raymond’s life spirals into a whirlpool of paranoia, murder, and the other things that karma brings.

Most of “The Square” hinges on a few key mistakes like an uncharged cell phone or a fight going just the right/wrong way into a spike sticking out of the ground but writers Joel Edgerton and Matthew Dabner have an amazing knack of keeping the plates spinning and maintaining the suspension of disbelief while the film unfolds. It’s one of my favorite scripts of the year. Only in hindsight does the cavalcade of bad luck feel a bit overdone and some of the character’s behavior starts to show plot holes, but you can say that about most noirs. The key is in believing the action in the moment and “The Square” is riveting from beginning to end.





The Square

Photo credit: Apparition

Joel Edgerton and Dabner don't deserve all the credit. Nash displays an amazing rhythm and pacing that most noir directors never find, much less in their debut. And the streak of very black humor involving Ray and Claire's dogs and the fact that threatening notes are written on Christmas cards, among other things, makes the comparison to the Coen brothers even more appropriate.

The only significant flaw in "The Square" is in the playing of the lead. It's not that David Roberts is a bad actor but his square jaw and somber eyes betray the everyman qualities that this character should have had to truly make it a genre masterpiece. Roberts kind of plays Ray like a jerk from the very beginning and it's a more low-key performance than I believe the part called for. The supporting cast - especially Hayes and Edgerton as very believable bad guys - makes up for the lack of personality in the center of the piece.

Ultimately, the most personality is off-camera as this is truly an announcement of the arrival of the Edgerton brothers above all else. I can't wait to see what they do next.

*'The Square' stars David Roberts, Claire van der Boom, Joel Edgerton, and Anthony Hayes. It was written by Joel Edgerton and Matthew Dabner and directed by Nash Edgerton. It is now playing in some markets, opened in Chicago on April 30th, 2010, and will continue to expand around the country. It is rated R.*



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