

Stunning 'Compliance' Will Rattle You For Days

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 30, 2012 - 11:18am

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Craig Zobel's "Compliance" has provoked outbursts, walk-outs, and altercations at screenings since it first premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival. Why? What does this unsettling film tap in viewers to get them as fired up as any movie in years? It may not have the jump-cuts of current horror films like "The Apparition" and "The Possession" but make no mistake – this is real horror. It's the kind of horror that provokes something primal in viewers to the point that they feel like they need to respond, often deriding the action as if it's not believable. The amazing thing, of course, is that every word of it is true.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about "Compliance" is how quickly it turns viewers into behavioral judges. "Oh, I wouldn't believe it. I wouldn't do that. I'm smarter than these people." And, then, just as you think you're above the action, the story of "Compliance" becomes truly horrific and the judgment turns within, even subconsciously, and that's what has caused the outbursts at Q&As. We think we're more world-wise than these people and that this could never happen and then Zobel brilliantly forces us to come to terms with those judgments. He doesn't present his horror film in the traditional sense of a villain and a victim. There is a horrible human being in "Compliance" but the victims don't scream like a slasher movie. They walk right into the spinning propeller and that's truly terrifying. How are you so sure you wouldn't do the same?



Compliance

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

"Compliance" is based on an incident that happened at a McDonald's in Kentucky in 2004. The Assistant Manager on duty was called by someone who identified himself as a police officer. After gaining her trust over the phone, the officer told the manager that one of her employees had been accused of stealing. He instructed the manager to hold the employee in a back room until cops could arrive. And then this faux cop, who turned out to be a prank caller, decided to see how far he could go. Would the manager strip search the employee? Worse? Where would the line be for you if a police officer instructed you to do something that seemed against your moral code?

In "Compliance," the fantastic Ann Dowd plays Sandra, the manager of a fictional fast food restaurant called ChickWich. She's already having a bad day because someone left the refrigerator door open the night before and a lot of her restaurant's produce is bad. She fears managerial repercussion, which already puts her in a vulnerable position in terms of authority. When a caller identifying himself as Officer Daniels (the always-great Pat Healy) name drops her superior as someone who's participating with the investigation, it carries more weight because of the problems that morning and she goes along.



Compliance

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

Dreama Walker (“Don’t Trust the B—— in Apt. 23”) plays Becky, the employee who falls horrible victim to one of the most despicable phone pranks in history. Becky is accused, held, strip-searched, and forced to sit naked as she waits for the officer who will never come. As the restaurant gets busier, Sandra has to leave the back room where Becky is being held and she needs someone else to watch her. And here’s where “Compliance” gets dark enough that people have been walking out all across the country.

To say that “Compliance” is unsettling would be an understatement. It is a film in which good people make horrible, horrible decisions. Sandra is not a villain and yet if she considered the nature of the requests being made by the prank caller for a second, one would think that she would immediately know that things were going too far. And asking male employees and even her boyfriend to watch Becky? Is it mere stupidity or should we judge Sandra even more harshly as a villain? It’s up to you to decide.



Compliance

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

What is not up for debate is the quality of the performances and the raw honesty of the filmmaking here. Dowd and Walker are simply spectacular, co-leads in an absolute nightmare. Dowd does an amazing job of never overplaying any of the potential pitfalls of Sandra, a character who could have been too broadly sketched to be as scarily believable as she is here. And Walker also never overplays her victim role, realizing that melodrama could have been a device to lessen the realistic tension of the piece.

That’s what makes “Compliance” so memorable. It’s the kind of thing that were it an episode of “Law & Order: SVU,” we might suggest that it was nothing more than a bad screenwriter’s demented fiction and yet it’s all true. By directing his cast to such stunningly believable performances and presenting his story in such disturbingly realistic tones, Craig Zobel has proven that it is sometimes relatable people – ones

like you and me – that can be scarier than any movie boogeyman.

"Compliance" stars Ann Dowd, Dreama Walker, and Pat Healy. It was written and directed by Craig Zobel. It is already playing in some markets and opens in Chicago on August 31, 2012.



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