

'Closed Circuit' is a Tense Reminder of Our Times

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The threat of terrorist acts defies security. That is a fundamental truth. With 7 billion people on the planet – and an infinite number of motivations within them – all the security cameras, techniques and agencies cannot stop a determined group or individual, as depicted in “Closed Circuit.”

The film presents a fictional terrorist scenario in London – a market bombing – and dissects it through the legal defense team that will try to determine their client’s connection to the crime. The complex story uncovers a web of deceit and cover-up, and the British government is involved. But basically the film speaks to power – the power of determination over bureaucracy, the power of secrets over truth and the power of a societal structure that allows governmental agencies to freely spend and develop terrorist preventatives that ultimately are just cover-thy-butts procedures.

The film begins with the multiple points-of-view familiar to closed circuit security cameras. A bustling London market is going through the ritual of the day. On one view, there is a truck having problems being illegally parked. The truck explodes, killing hundreds of Londoners. Only one man, Farroukh Erdogan (Denis Moschitto), is prosecuted for the crime. The storage space that he rented had the explosives, and the driver of the truck used it.



Martin (Eric Bana) and Claudia (Rebecca Hall) Under Scrutiny in 'Closed Circuit'

Photo credit: Focus Features

The trial occurs several months later. The British government, represented by the Attorney General (Jim Broadbent), is bamboozled when the lead defense attorney commits suicide. His replacement, Martin Rose (Eric Bana), has a personal hitch regarding the trial – the Special Advocate Claudia Simmons-Howe (Rebecca Hall) is an ex-lover, and is assigned to interpret classified documents that even Martin can't be privy to. This puts both of them in the middle of many secrets, and those secrets have implications on several levels.

The story is – to use a term – “ripped from the headlines.” It represents the current culture of fear, and how far a government bureaucracy will go to redirect those “fears.” This is a fascinating and very tense procedural narrative, capitalizing on all the emotions of a terrorist act, and the authorities role to calm down people to keep them consuming. There are many levels of agents and double agents associated with this work, including the legal team elements, and the clash of all these power brokers reeks havoc on the truth. As history teaches us, the easiest way to ease fears after tragedy is to immediately blame someone (Lee Harvey Oswald) or eliminate their secrets to the grave (again, Oswald).

The performances are top drawer and the cast is deep with veteran players. Eric Bana is more character-driven than leading man in the story, and is able to communicate the frustration of the circumstance. Rebecca Hall is too young and too physically striking to embody an intellectual defense attorney, but she pulls it off by creating gravitas and vulnerability. And what is a British bureaucrat film without the impressive Jim Broadbent, and the essential Clarán Hinds? Both men know what they're doing in approach to stoic characterizations.

Profiling is implied in the film. The terrorist being held is of Middle Eastern descent, and the protocol around him is to scapegoat his involvement. What is unique about how screenwriter Steven Knight structured the scenario is that the suspect has a wife and child, and both those family members are being watched and watching their captors. It gets to the point of sympathy for that side, with a nice balance and exposition of typical prejudices.



Martin Consults with Devlin (Clarán Hinds) in 'Closed Circuit'
Photo credit: Focus Features

The film does seem to at first be about the “eye in the sky,” the overwhelming network of security cameras that take pictures of us daily. But then it switches to the humans behind those eyes, the ones that make the decisions based on the illusion of digital imagery. To use the Kennedy assassination analogy again, what is the Zapruder film than a “camera” that happened to catch the crime? What conclusions do we draw from it? Yep, all convoluted ones.

The film does get a bit cloak and dagger, this is a high octane dramatic movie after all, but the larger issues are the most important part of this fine film. Who are we as pawns in the chess match of consumer commerce, and to what extent are we being “protected”?

“Closed Circuit” opens everywhere on August 28th. Featuring Eric Bana, Rebecca Hall, Jim Broadbent, Clarán Hinds and Denis Moschitto. Screenplay by Steven Knight. Directed by John Crowley. Rated “R”



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