

Film Reviews

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Film Review

***Body of Lies*, Warner Brothers, 2008, MPAA Rating: R, Runtime: 2 hours, Starring: Leonardo DiCaprio, Russell Crowe, Mark Strong, Golshifteh Farahani, Oscar Isaac, Simon McBurney Director: Ridley Scott, Screenwriter: William Monahan, Producer: Donald DeLine, Ridley Scott.**

Leonardo DiCaprio fights terrorists for the CIA in this rapid-fire thriller from director Ridley Scott (GLADIATOR, BLACK HAWK DOWN).

Body of Lies is about a CIA officer, Roger Ferris (DiCaprio), pursuing an elusive terrorist mastermind modeled somewhat after Osama bin Laden, and the various degrees of ethical or moral struggles with which Ferris must deal.

The film is infused with the obligatory explosions, pyrotechnics, hi-tech surveillance, gunfights, car chases, blood and gore, and of course the clichéd love interest. Ferris' exploits are monitored via satellites, drone spy planes, and cell phones by CIA Near Division Chief Ed Hoffman (Russell Crowe). Innocents are killed, careers placed into jeopardy, and trusts betrayed. Crowe seems to enjoy his role as the deceptive, amoral, hard-nosed, southern colonel-like boss, untouched by the ethical dilemmas affecting Ferris. For Hoffman, it's about getting the job done and the war won, at any cost. As the debonair director of the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate, Mark Strong masterfully portrays the refined, erudite intelligence wizard in sharp contrast to Hoffman. Departing from the original novel by David Ignatius, director Scott casts the attractive Persian actress Golshifteh Farahani as a nurse attending to throngs of Palestinian refugees in Amman. She becomes Ferris' love interest when she treats him for a rabid dog bite suffered while chasing down and terminating one of many evil doers he encounters. Screenwriter William Monahan demonstrated faithfulness to the original Ignatius tale, and his changes do not detract from the overall story.

Counterterrorism and intelligence operations conducted by national security organs largely swim in the oceans of deception. That is where the terrorists and secrets live. Several times throughout the movie, Ferris wrestles with his conscience about deceitful acts he must commit. Ferris also challenges his boss, Hoffman, on decisions and actions Hoffman callously undertakes or directs. Lies are the *idée fixe* of the entire film. Real life intelligence and counterterrorism officers face this issue throughout their careers beginning with living undercover, ostensibly working for some other employer while actually being employed by an

intelligence organization. This sort of life takes its toll differently on different people.

As in the original novel, Ferris is Hoffman's fair haired protégé. Though Hoffman is Ferris' superior officer, the latter suffers no punishment or even reprimands for regular insubordination (mostly verbal). Hoffman spends more time monitoring Ferris and his operations while away from his Langley office than in it. Unless this is the new telecommuting technique at CIA, such activity is unprofessional, insecure, and just plain ridiculous.

Viewers will no doubt come away from the film asking themselves and others if CIA and the broader intelligence community have some of the technical capabilities displayed in the film. Without my commenting on current capabilities, movie goers should enjoy all the high-tech creations of intercepts, aerial-drone reconnaissance, and their like for what they added to the film and hope that if not already available, the technical capabilities of our national security apparatus will acquire them in the near future.

What would Hollywood do without the blood and brutality? Ferris is haunted throughout the movie by flashbacks to seeing a person tortured and ultimately killed during interrogation by a foreign intelligence service. Ferris has to make split second decisions about killing or being killed. Toward the end, Ferris himself undergoes some bloody torture that will make any audience cringe. The brutality depicted is not gratuitous but reasonably reflects reality in the struggle with terrorists. Innocents only matter to the good guys while the purveyors of terror consider everyone a fair target.

Golshifteh Farahani, as the attractive Persian nurse Aisha, is the metaphor for good and caring. She and her ministrations to refugees are the counterpoint to all the evil infecting mankind. Ultimately, Aisha (interestingly the name of Mohammed's supposed favorite wife) is the reason Ferris leaves his counterterrorist life to take a new and implicitly better road.

As for endorsing this movie, let it be said that if you have the time and inclination to sit through two hours of Russell Crowe and Leonardo DiCaprio, go for it.

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