

Friday, January 16th, 7.30pm

Locke (15)

dir: Steven Knight

starring: Tom Hardy

sponsor: Impsafe

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Locke is a pessimistic and disturbing film that explores how easily a solid, seemingly grounded life can crumble. Brilliantly written by its director Steven Knight and performed with utter conviction by Tom Hardy (the only actor we see in the film), it has an emotional urgency that stops it seeming like a self-conscious formal exercise. Even so, this is a claustrophobic affair, set entirely in Ivan Locke's car during a fraught night-time journey down the motorway.

At first, Locke appears as much in control of his life as he is of his BMW. We can tell that he is a practical and resourceful man by the way he juggles telephone conversations even as he drives at speed. He speaks in a lilting Welsh accent, rarely raising his voice. It is apparent that he has a deep sense of responsibility. He is a building manager, and is taking it on himself to make sure that a delivery at the construction site goes without a hitch even as he is having fraught conversations with both his wife and the woman who is about to have his baby after a one-night stand he deeply regrets. He doesn't want to let anybody down.

The film was shot over a period of six or seven nights, and the actors speaking to Hardy were calling him as he drove. This gives the story some of the immediacy of live drama. The action is deliberately hemmed in – for 85 minutes we watch a man in a car speaking on a hands-free phone. The film-makers attempt to create a sense of atmosphere and visual energy by showing the lights from other cars reflected on Hardy's face; music is used in atmospheric fashion. There's a sense of movement simply because the car is driving fast along the motorway – but Knight's screenplay would work just as well on radio. The drama here hinges on the voices, not the visuals.

The performances from the actors we hear but don't see register strongly. Olivia Colman conveys the anxiety and diffidence of Locke's mistress Bethan, who is about to go into labour and is terrified of what she faces. Ruth Wilson is equally convincing as Locke's aggrieved wife, who can't forgive, whatever reserves of love and affection she has for him. Countering the prevailing gloom of the film, the drunken musings of Locke's colleague Donal (Andrew Scott) provide a measure of comic relief.



Knight's film is one of several recent one-handers – movies in which lone characters battle against overwhelming problems. Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* and J. C. Chandor's *All Is Lost* are other examples of films in which individuals try desperately to save themselves. The obvious difference is that *Locke* isn't stuck in outer space or lost at sea. His crisis is all to do with the muddle he has somehow made of his private life.

There's something forlorn and pathetic about the way that Locke tells his wife, whom he has no desire to leave, that he only cheated on her once. Once is enough. He has a microscopic attention to detail. As he notes, a single flaw in the foundation can cause an entire building to collapse – and, as his wife makes very clear, there is a huge chasm between 'never' and 'once'. In betraying her, he has crossed that chasm.

Thankfully, Knight's screenplay largely keeps pretentiousness at bay. This is not intended as an absurdist drama about a man alone, forced to confront the existential meaninglessness of existence. Locke is a resolutely down-to-earth figure with a specialist knowledge of concrete, even if he does speak in occasional mumbling monologues. Hardy has given many grandstanding screen performances as Batman villains or belligerent British convicts. Here, he is in restrained mood. He needs to keep his eyes on the road – so his scope for big physical gestures is obviously limited.

Knight's achievement is to tell a story in which the lead character's life unravels without any face-to-face screaming matches or scenes of fights or slamming doors. In a digital, hyper-connected world, Locke's tragedy can be portrayed in full by him sitting behind the wheel of a BMW.

As a film, *Locke* could easily have seemed alienating – an experimental, art-installation-style exercise rather than a dramatic narrative feature. Knight, though, is able to transcend the limitations he has set himself and makes us care about this soft-spoken building manager whose very well-ordered life is about to come crashing down.

Synopsis: UK, the present. Ivan Locke is a building manager. He is in his car, driving at night down the motorway from Wales to London. During the journey he has a series of conversations on his car phone. He is heading towards a hospital to be with Bethan, who is about to give birth to his child. She is very anxious and wants him to be with them. He also talks frequently with his wife and son, and with his colleagues at the building site. A very complicated delivery of concrete is due to take place the next day and Locke is worried that his colleagues aren't competent to deal with it. He tries to talk them through what they must do and what permission they need from the police. He makes small-talk with his son about the football team they both support, which is playing as they speak. The son expects him home. Locke also talks with his wife. In the course of his journey, it becomes apparent that his life is unravelling: he is about to lose his job and family over a one-night stand with Bethan, a woman he doesn't even care for.

Credits(selected)

Ivan Locke: Tom Hardy
Bethan: Olivia Colman
Katrina Locke: Ruth Wilson
Donal: Andrew Scott
Gareth: Ben Daniels
Eddie Locke: Tom Holland
Sean Locke: Bill Milner

Writer/Director: Steven Knight
DoP: Haris Zambariakos
Music: Dickon Hinchliffe
Editor: Justine Wright

Lincoln Film Society

Patron: Jim Broadbent

Interview with Steven Knight & Tom Hardy for Variety magazine, April 2014

Director Steven Knight wrote his experimental indie feature *Locke* in only two and a half weeks. That's a long time compared to the mere five nights it took him to finish most of the shooting. And a typical day on the set, located on various freeways in England, lasted six to seven hours.

One reason for such a compressed schedule was that *Locke* only shows one actor: the wonderful Tom Hardy who plays Ivan Locke. All the action is set in real time on a singular car ride. Then again, there isn't much action in the dialogue-heavy story, with Locke chatting with a small group of characters on the phone. (The other actors called into the moving vehicle live from a different location.)

Knight and Hardy spoke to Variety about their film.

Did you get the idea for this movie when you were driving?

Steven Knight: Not really. I was looking at footage from a more conventional film I made before. We tested cameras by shooting out of moving vehicles. The result, I thought, was hypnotic and beautiful.

How did you pitch it to Tom?

Knight: We were talking about something else. And the idea had come of doing this about an ordinary man making a journey where he begins with everything and ends with nothing.

Hardy: It was a short film.

Knight: And it became long. Oh, by the way, it's got 90 pages.

Would you have done it as a short?

Hardy: I would have done anything for Steve, to be honest. I was excited by the premise. Not to be crude, but I saw it as a student film by professionals. We were together to create something in no time whatsoever with a really solid script. And we just went for it.

How did you write it so quickly?

Knight: Anything quick that I write is better than anything slow. Because if it's right, it'll come quickly. If it's slow, it's because there's a problem, usually. With this, I wrote it pretty much out of Christmas in two and a half weeks.

Sandra Bullock had said when she did "Gravity," she felt lonely. Did you feel isolated like that, Tom?

Hardy: Not at all. I was with all my mates. I got a whole team surrounding me.

Were you worried it wouldn't work?

Knight: I always thought it would work for me. I thought it would for Tom as well. I always thought at the end of it, we would have something that we would be pleased with.

Hardy: We couldn't fail.

Why?

Hardy: It's a creative endeavor. The script is so tight. The dialogue moves sequitur to non-sequitur. There's a trajectory. The characters and the relationships are so diverse, there's so much to mine. You could not make a mistake apart from not making the effort. Do you know what I mean? That's not talking about the financial success of the movie. If nobody recorded it, we just sat in a room, I've got this script. We'd come out and

say that's fucking good fun man. It's got to be made. The question is execution. Did the audience enjoy it as much as we enjoyed participating in it?

Knight: The greatest thing is that wherever we've shown it, including Salt Lake City, the West Coast, U.S. audiences, European audiences, they forget this is a film that's been made in a different way. They engage with Ivan. They engage with his dilemma. Within 6 minutes, people have forgotten. They are no longer expecting to get out of the car. We did a version where there were more cutaways, more shots from outside the car. People didn't want it. They wanted to get back in again.

You mean test audiences?

Knight: No, nothing about this film was done in the normal way. God knows we all worked the normal way.

How was it financed?

Knight: It was financed by a paragraph to IM Global saying this is what we want to do.

Did you have a big budget?

Knight: No, a small budget.

Hardy: "Bronson" was the same way.

Knight: It was less than \$2million. It means people leave you alone a lot more. They leave you alone entirely, because the risk they are taking is quite small. You get the freedom to control and do it.

Was the car on a soundstage?

Knight: No, it's a car in the back of a low-loader, so we're driving for real. To do that was breaking all the rules. On the road, you'll get all of these wonderful happy accidents that happened when you actually moving.

Where were you going?

Knight: M1, M6, M25. These are motorways. We shot from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m., so it would be a varied amount of traffic. Because you're really moving, you're going to get things happening in terms of reflection, light, other vehicles.

Would you take breaks?

Knight: Every 27 minutes, you'd have to pull over and change the memory card in the three cameras. But only like a Formula 1 stop. We'd take the opportunity to change the lens, change the angle and pick up where we started.

Would you get distracted?

Hardy: Of course. And I got calls coming in when Steve decides that they are coming in. I'd sit there and wait, and the call comes and I know what it is. But I didn't know when it's coming.

Knight: Opening oneself up to the world is great, like Tom having a cold. In fiction, you either have your marriage break up or you have a cold. In reality, that's going to happen in the same time.

Hardy: I had a cold. That was real. So I needed my Dayquil. We were shooting and I just taking my Dayquil normally and the cameras were on. The stuff with the handkerchief up your wrist, like when you're snotty rag, up the sleeve, that's a typical dad or mom sort of things. Stock the tissue away somewhere. It's just a life thing. Why not use it?

Film Editor Ramin Setoodeh

Our next film: Friday January 23rd

In Secret (15: USA, 2013)

Based on Émile Zola's scandalous novel, *Thérèse Raquin*, *IN SECRET* is a tale of obsessive love, adultery and revenge set in the lower depths of 1860s Paris. Thérèse (Elizabeth Olsen of "Martha Marcy May Marlene"), a sexually repressed beautiful young woman, is trapped into a loveless marriage to her sickly cousin, Camille (Tom Felton of the "Harry Potter" franchise), by her domineering aunt, Madame Raquin (Jessica Lange).

Thérèse spends her days confined behind the counter of a small shop and her evenings watching Madame play dominoes with an eclectic group. After she meets her husband's alluring childhood friend, Laurent (Oscar Isaac of "Inside Llewyn Davis"), she embarks on an illicit affair that leads to tragic consequences.