



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

The UK's largest rural film festival

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In the Loop (15)

Director: Armando Iannucci

Starring: James Gandolfini, Tom Hollander, Peter Capaldi, Gina McKee

UK, 2009, 1 hour 46 minutes

...Both *The Thick of It* and *In the Loop* share a keen sense of insider knowledge. Former spin doctor Martin Sixsmith is credited as a script consultant, and Iannucci has "a repertory company of gossipers" in Westminster - but he also found a well-connected Washington blogger who had written an article called *Is George Bush Alan Partridge?*. Iannucci approached him, and the blogger fixed up a week of meetings with ex-CIA, Pentagon, state department and senate staffers.

"It was very, very interesting, as you go round the place all the buildings look grand from the outside, but once you get inside they're all scuzzy. If you want to seize a metaphor, it's that thing of looking like you know what you're doing on the outside, but on the inside it's just people running around with boxes piled up cos they haven't had a chance to unpack.

"And then there's the fact that it is run by 22-year-olds. They all have important sounding degrees, like terrorism studies from Georgetown. They're all bright, but they've never really gone out. But because the place is so big, and all the people at the top have so much to do, all the other stuff gets passed on to them. So there was a 22-year-old sent out to Baghdad to help draw up the new constitution. You know, a constitution for a whole country. A 22-year-old! We met a guy of 23 who was left with the entire Central American budget to look after."

The Americans were delighted to help with the research, but Iannucci didn't want any American money. "We were offered some, and I just thought" - he searches for a polite way to put it, and gives up - "No! I'd rather do a UK-funded film, so that as we're making it there's no even subconscious kind of thinking, well, let's just lighten it up a bit for the Americans. You'd start going, 'Oh, shall we make it a little bit more upbeat at the end? Or do we really need to make them all bastards?'"

The transition to the big screen always requires some sacrifice of subtlety, though. The film's aesthetic remains true to the realism of the series, and Jacqui Smith and her husband will probably wince at the scene where the minister doesn't dare order porn on his hotel TV, for fear of being caught. But the plot is essentially closer to farce, and Alastair Campbell recently declared the film "boring" on account of it being over-the-top and unrealistic.

"It's an entertainment fiction, it's not a documentary," Iannucci points out. "Yes, we're exaggerating and distorting for comic effect, and they should see that. So we invent and we exaggerate and whatever, and make it absurd. But then," he adds, "often somebody says that actually happened."

Decca Aitkenhead, *The Guardian*, April 2009

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